Phone : 2139

THE SHORT STORY

Edited by MANJERI S. ISVARAN

Volume I — January 1935 — Number 6

CONTENTS

		Page
Editorial	The Whispering Gallery	247
Aundy	Her Happiness	249
Navagar	Atonement	255
Manjeri S. Isvaran	Seashells	265
M. S. K.	The Awakening	268
M. Gopal Rao	The Uninvited	271
Schwartz Ponratnam	Injustice	275
S. Rajagopalan	Minion of The Moon	288
M. R. M. Sundaram	The Bowl of Night	281
A. Ramiah	"*She*"	283
	India in English Fiction	285
	In the Book World	287

The Editor will be glad to consider stories offered for publication and will endeavour to return unsuitable manuscripts when they are accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope. He will take no responsibility for the loss of manuscripts.

All communications should be sent to the Manager of The Short Story, Triplicane, Madras.

The annual subscription is Re. 1-8 as., post free to any address in India. Foreign, 6s. or 2 $. The advertisement rates may be obtained on application to the Manager.

Copyright in all the stories published in The Short Story (the characters in these are purely fictitious) is with the Magazine. Reproductions, imitations, or translations of these are expressly forbidden.

The Short Story is published in the first week of every month. We shall be glad to review Fiction in its pages. Books for review should reach the office at least *four weeks* before the date of publication of the Magazine.

Printed at The "Sound & Shadow Press" & Published by the Proprietor, "The Short Story," Triplicane, Madras.

MORE THAN CORONETS

Mr. K. V. Ramachandran, Literary and Art Critic, Madras, writes :—

The release by Mr Isvaran of the "Short Story" is opportune because at no time was the short story in greater favour than it is today. It is a pleasant discovery indeed that there are in our midst so many young men endowed with that rarest of gifts—imaginative expression. Mr Chalapathi Rao writes *literature*—one of his pieces is sheer music—and I am certain that the foremost literary periodicals of England and America would consider it a privilege if they could number him among their contributors. Mr Chalapathi Rao writes marvellous prose and his compositions are a triumph in literary craftsmanship. Mr Isvaran has not only mastered the technique of the short story, but also the secret of endowing it with life. If merit were the sole criterion of success, no periodical deserves it more richly than the "Short Story". I hope that the public will not let such a deserving journal suffer for want of support.

The Hindustan Times, Delhi, writes. :—

Mr Isvaran has made a welcome departure from the beaten track of fun magazines by his "Short Story". The first four numbers of this interesting little monthly which have been sent to us, contain a number of really good short stories, Indian in their character and setting. The cover page of the magazine is well-designed and suggestive. Short story writing is a difficult art and not to many is given the talent to produce a really bright short story. Like the epigram in language which condenses in a small compass what is usually said in a whole sentence, the short story aims at representing dramatic incidents in a short compass. Weeding out of needless verbiage and retention of the essentially dramatic incidents mean no small thing, especially at a time when the average man has paradoxically enough no time to be brief. He indulges in copious verbiage unmindful of the truth which Pope so clearly expressed in the lines:

> Words are like leaves and where they most abound
> Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found.

For a beginning Mr Isvaran has done remarkably well and in course of time "Short Story" is bound to become a popular periodical.

The WHISPERING GALLERY of LIFE & LETTERS

(This section is devoted to Editorial Comments on current topics of interest)

The truly great
Have all one age, and from one visible place
Shed influence. They, both in power and act,
Are permanent, and Time is not with them,
Save as it worketh for them, they in it.—

COLERIDGE

It is in the highest degree unphilosophic to call language or diction the dress of our thoughts . . . It is the incarnation of our thoughts.—

WORDSWORTH

Mr John Cowper Powys

'I HAVE tried to write it as if I were going to be executed when it was finished. I have tried to write it as if I were God and the Devil, the former justifying the artistic unity of his grotesque creation, the latter indicating its chaotic confusion.' So writes Mr John Cowper Powys in his "Autobiography" (Bodley Head, 15s.), and he has proved every word of his self-revelation. The only way of reviewing this remarkable book is to quote and quote from it; the narration is very vivid, very arresting, and the juicy vernacular of it all is abundant satisfaction to general taste. 'The grand struggle of my life,' says Mr Powys, 'has been between my conscience and my impulse to live a life made up solely and entirely of sensual-mystical sensations.' Emotions that lie on the surface are clean but not genuine; raw ungroomed emotions proclaim the man who is a genius with whom to be familiar is impossible. The passages in the book are Freudian images bottled in varicoloured bottles; they are extremely characteristic of the author of *Glastonbury Romance*, one of the best sellers in fiction for 1934, and *In Defence of Vulgarity*. 'My enemies,' he goes on to say needlebright, 'and those worse than enemies, my patronizing admirers, who are even now skimming this excitable work, will doubtless affix many semi-scientific labels to my aberrations, have indeed probably already rushed to their psychopathic text-books to find out what I can possibly be up to, when I refer to my power of experiencing the emotions of women and girls. But the more I soak myself in the works of Shakespeare and Dostoievsky the more I recognise that both these men have the magic power of *becoming women*. *That* is the point. *That* is where the intelligences of our modern critics are dull.' And thus and thus. Reading the "Autobiography" we see the exciting picture of a China-

man, lithe and angular, turning round and round to eat his own pigtail; we become all mind and enjoy a boisterous peace; we find repose in storm, in a furious storm.

A New Shakespeare

A HANDY one-volume Shakespeare into which are gathered the whole works of the dramatist has been published by Messrs Basil Blackwell, of Oxford, proprietors of the Shakespeare Head Press. The text is prepared by the distinguished Elizabethan scholar, Arthur Henry Bullen. The plays are arranged in chronological order, showing the development of Shakespeare's genius. The characters' names are set above their speeches for clearness and pleasure in reading. The volume is available in red, blue, or green bindings, contains 1,300 pages, and is priced at six shillings. No true lover of Shakespeare should miss this exquisitely got-up volume.

George Bernard Shaw

FREEDOM of the City of London has been given to G. B. S. An immortal he has received the freedom of the Celestial City long ago; in London he is a legend.

A Noted Art Critic

DEATH has occurred at the age of seventy-three of Mr E. B. Havell, late of the Indian Educational Service and a well-known authority on Indian Art. Mr Havell was Superintendent of the School of Arts, Madras, and later Principal of the Calcutta School of Art and keeper of the Government Art Gallery. He re-organised art education on Indian lines and helped to form the new school of Indian painting. In addition to his work in the field of art, he also initiated a movement for the revival of handloom weaving and took an active part in the Calcutta University reform. He was the author of several publications relating to Indian sculpture, painting, art, and architecture. He had style, natural and beautiful, and his works were characterised by sincerity and thoroughness.

An Amalgamation

FROM January 1935 the *Bookman* is to be amalgamated with the *London Mercury*. The *Bookman* has been published by Messrs Hodder and Stoughton for forty-four years and in the course of its long life has had but three editors. The *London Mercury* is twenty-nine years younger; it was in the year immediately following the War, that Sir John (then Mr) Squire founded it. In October last the *Mercury* passed into new control and is now owned by the Morvern Press, a private company. Creative work drawing more and more of his time and attention, Sir John Squire retired from active control and Mr R. A. Scott-James was appointed editor. And Mr Scott—James wrote in an eloquent editorial in the October issue of the Journal: 'Fifteen years is something more than a sojourn, being half-a-generation as the genealogists reckon, and two generations (according to the newest estimates) in literature. It goes without saying that in the endeavour to establish itself as a literary magazine, the *Mercury* has had its tribulations. But it has survived them. . . . And now that Sir John Squire has decided to withdraw from the editorial fray and devote himself more exclusively to writing work, he takes with him—though perhaps it is absurd to go through the form of telling him what he knows so well—the affectionate good wishes of innumerable friends and admirers . . . . The *London Mercury*, I hope, will be fortunate enough to retain the services of the wise and experienced elders and to enlist those of men who are trying to blaze new trails.' The services of Sir John Squire to literary journalism are too well known; the amalgamation of the *Bookman* with the *Mercury*, Mr Scott-James can take, will strengthen his hope and in a large measure fulfil his wish. But it is to him to see that the identity of the older Journal is not completely obliterated.

HER HAPPINESS

By AUNDY

MRS SARADA SUNDARAM, L.M.P. had gone to Trivandrum dreaming to meet an ideal Barrister husband, but as he proved to be an incurable physical as well as mental wreck, her shock had been terrible. It had taken three weeks for her to subside into her normal mood after her excited walk-out from his house, inspite of the consoling assurances of her father, Collector Viswanatha Sarma. And in the fourth week, when I came to Madras on my secret mission of marrying the widow, Kamala, she was looking quiet and composed.

'Good morning, were you waiting for us?' said I, as I entered with Kamala, and her father, the spacious hall of Collector Viswanatha Sarma's residence in Madras.

'Never mind! Welcome to you all!' greeted his daughter, Sarada.

'Be seated Mr Iyer. You too, madam. Sit down, Pichai,' said Mr Sarma. 'You are lodged in the Hindu Hotel?'

'Yes, and at a cost of Rs. 3 per head per diem,' replied the shrewd Vakil Mr Iyer.

Vakil E. T. S. Iyer (Erachikulam Theevatti Subramania Iyer) is not even now an unknown personality. The whole Bar of Travancore had once assembled in conference to discuss the law's delays, and had recommended as a practical solution the promotion of Mr Iyer to the Bench. But the decree-debtors, the insolvents, and the defendants were shrewder and a noncaste prostitute was induced to launch a maintenance suit for Rs. 3000 against him which lasted until his claims to the Bench were barred by age. It was reported, therefore, by a wag that the Law's Delays Committee was constituted with the ulterior motive of discovering the number of weak cells in his brain. Their failure to do it has made him lose nowadays some true cases as well.

There was once a torchlight dacoity in the village of Erachikulam. Cash and jewels worth about Rs. 50,000 were looted from various houses. Just when the dacoits were entering the village, Mr Iyer fell down dead and his old mother-in-law and wife dirged aloud extempore curses on the wretched cholera that deprived them of their breadwinner. The imposture was so perfect that the ringleader of the dacoits was not only mortally afraid of entering the house but also flung in from the street a purse of Rs. 50 to his wife for the morrow's funeral and other expenses. Even the villagers were disillusioned only when Mr Iyer himself was seen preparing the mahazar along with the police the next morning. From that day onwards his initial letter T which stood originally for his father's name, represented Theevatti or Torchlight in honour of his having outwitted a whole gang of dacoits.

'Why should you try to keep it a secret? Is widow-marriage a novelty in Madras?' queried Mr Sarma.

'How can we expect everyone to be radical in such matters?' I said.

'Now that you have known me, why can't you shift here? You'll all be good company to my lonely Sarada.'

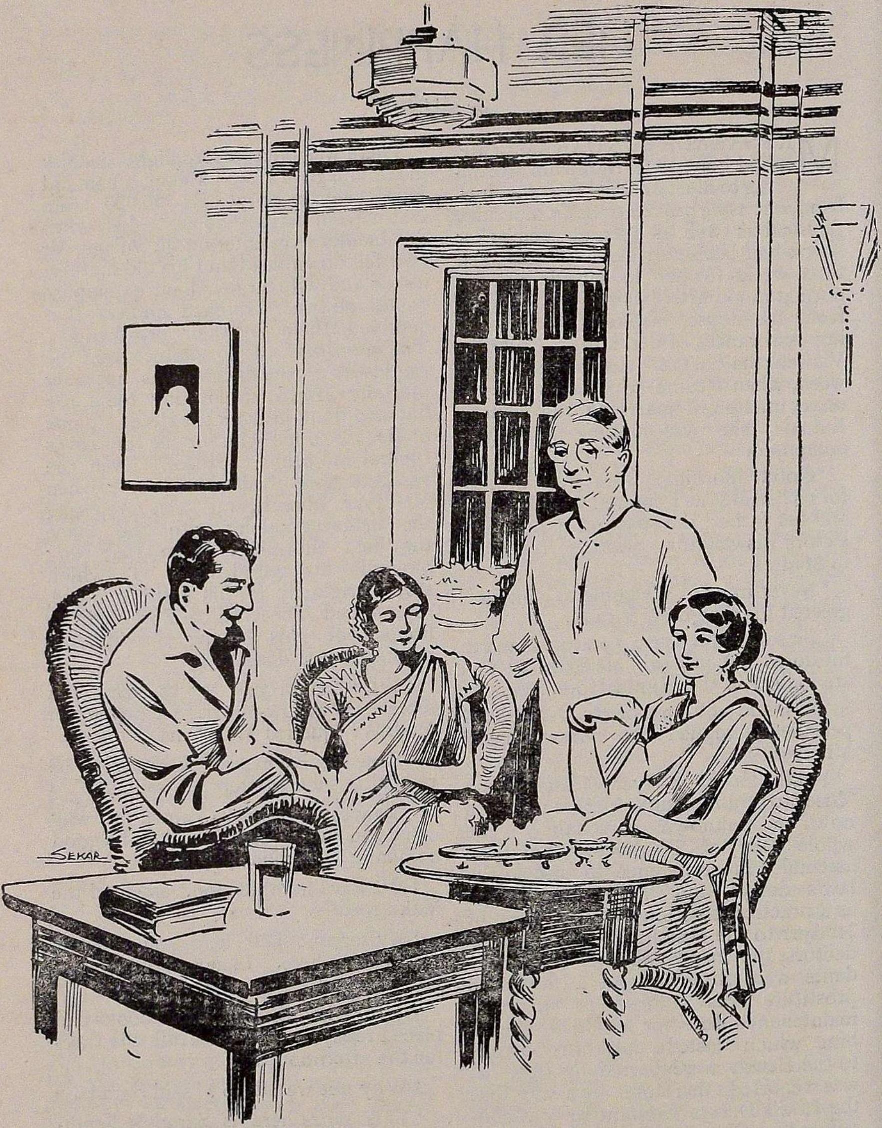
'We have no objection,' assented the Vakil readily.

'My servant shall help you to shift your effects here. I shall leave my car too with you.'

By this time the Collector's cooks had placed ready on the table all the trays for the afternoon tea.

'Why not we fall to?' said Sarada.

'This *sojjee* here is Sarada's handiwork. When we were to yours last at Trivandrum, your cook gave us a similar dish. Sarada learnt it from him and this is her debut,' remarked the Collector.



'I could not help bursting out into laughter at her ready wit and repartee.'

'Is it?' said Mr Iyer, immediately thrusting a handful into his mouth, '100 marks.'

'I always like it,' said I and tasted a spoon.

'I knew it. And here is your cup of butter-milk.'

'What!—You know that too?' asked Kamala in surprise.

'Yes, he hated coffee and tea years ago—long before you knew him.'

'You have no faith in horoscopes?' put in Mr Sarma.

'Bonfired all. My two wives had premature ends. And look at Kamala too. Astrology has deceived me thrice!'

'Why sir, the legal profession seems to be the chief votary to that science nowadays.'

'Idiots!'

'But those idiots might excommunicate you!'

'A young girl, unsophisticated, an easy prey to rakes—if she falls a victim to temptations, the great Sankaracharyas and Jews would stone her to death. I've had enough of this society of ours—damned and moribund! Let them excommunicate me if they dare! They can't do even that!'

Mr Sarma was surprised at the vehemence of the leaneyed Vakil.

'Each one has got his own grievances against our social customs. They need a thorough overhauling.'

'By-the-bye, you are silent, Kamala, and inscrutable.'

'She is ever so deep—very deep!' said I.

'All women are,' remarked Mr Iyer.

'That's slander. Are men shallow?' retorted Sarada.

The lunch was over in a few minutes.

The servants placed on the table a plate of *pansupari*.

'Don't you chew, Pichai?' asked the Collector.

'Thanks, no.'

'That's like my Sarada. Come Mr Iyer, we old men can't afford to have the luxury of being so puritanical.'

'Why not I fetch my trunks from the hotel now?' said Mr Iyer with the *pan* in his mouth.

'Yes, do,' and the Collector pressed the bell-button.

The chauffeur entered. 'Take this gentleman to the Hindu Hotel.'

Mr Iyer rose up and asked me, 'Going out?'

'No.'

'Well, then, I'll be back in fifteen minutes,' and he went out.

'The man seems to be businesslike,' remarked Mr Sarma.

'Though a vakil,' I interposed.

'Are vakils unbusinesslike?' asked Sarma in surprise.

'Only stupid and refractory as asses are. They would kick you if you lag behind, and bite you if you go ahead. India would have been free a century ago had it not been for these idiots!'

'Note him, Sarada, didn't I tell you he is a man of superlatives?'

'Yes, but braying is only positive, and kicking is comparative, while biting alone is superlative. Does he bite?' put in Sarada with her characteristic sarcasm.

I could not help bursting out into laughter at her ready wit and repartee, when the waiter announced the arrival of the Chief Presidency Magistrate at the door.

'You must excuse me, Pichai. It's time for me to attend the party at The Mohana Vilas. I'll be back in an hour.'

The Collector went into his dressing room to dress himself.

'Have you been to Madras before?' Sarada asked me.

'Yes, once. But that was long ago, and everything looks new to me now,' I said.

'How do you like it?'

'I am one who prefers city-life to the monotony of country-life. Hence Madras fascinates me.'

'Quite so. I too feel it. Even the rejection of my husband might partially be attributed to the threatened prospect of leaving my public life here for a domestic life elsewhere.'

'Well, Sarada,' said Mr Sarma re-entering in his official robes, 'keep them engaged until I return.' And he went out.

'Your father is a noble gentleman,' said I.

'But for him, I would have committed suicide. He was all along sympathetic towards me and my misfortunes.'

'If you won't accuse me of inquisitiveness, sister, may I ask you what you have decided to do next ?'

'I have'nt decided upon anything . I feel at every step the cruel, soul-killing partiality of the man-made Hindu marriage-law obstructing my evolution into full womanhood.'

'Neither the State nor the Society takes the charitable precaution of making marriage less criminally easy than it is.'

'If the experiment prove a failure, it ought to be a great deal less hard than it is to terminate it,' added Sarada.

'True, but our Hindu Law says otherwise.'

'It allows man the cherry and woman but the bitter taste. In a broken marriage, the poor jilted girl is scorned, whilst the jilting Juan improves his eligibility.'

'That's why more than half the men in the world are——'

'Philanderers. One half of them are lying to get some women, and the other half to get away from one. Well, I very badly need advice. Being motherless, I have never had anybody to confide my mind's worries. I often feel, in fact, the want of a brother. It is my good luck now that I have you by.'

'I am, as you said awhile ago, only braying out some paradoxes, and I do not know whether I have courage enough to practise them.'

'Well, I have it. Tell me.'

'I must think over.'

'May I suggest something ?' interposed the erstwhile silent Kamala.

'Please do,' entreated Sarada.

'Remarry and face the consequences.'

'Not a bad idea,' I remarked after a minute's silence inspired by the new idea.

'But will it be moral ?' queried Sarada seriously.

'Why not ?' replied Kamala. 'It's a penal act, no doubt, but not immoral. Most of the principles we cherish now as fundamentals had been penal at some time or place. Property, marriage, religion, education—our views on these have undergone revolutionary changes in the course of history. They will change again.'

I and Sarada stared in evident surprise at Kamala's unexpected erudition and logic.

'Yes, the supporters of conventional morality,' I added, 'are anxious at all costs to legislate against the diversities which they disapprove. Their self-expression is purchased by the suppression of yours.'

'Your business, therefore, is to challenge such a wrong, lest authority be victorious over justice and truth.' Kamala's face beamed as she spoke. 'Let the world crucify you for the act to-day, but it will worship you to-morrow for your moral courage.'

'Yes, but it requires two to practice this—penal truth—as you put it. And my abettor has to be a man—a member of the tyrant class. Which man will court imprisonment for wrecking his own social privileges ? I can't catch hold of any vagabond for the purpose !'

Kamala immediately rose from her chair and walking up to Sarada and holding her both hands in hers, looked straight into her eyes.

'Are you serious ?' she asked Sarada.

'I am. A volcano is yearning to burst out of my heart.'

'Really ?'

'Yes.' Kamala's stare grew more intent and had something of a frenzy in it.

'What is it ?' Sarada was perplexed.

'Will you accept *his* hand, if I offer him to you as your colleague in Satyagraha ?'

'My dear !' Sarada's confusion was complete.

'Me !' I interjected.

'Don't start !' interposed Kamala, seating both of us in our places. A minute's silence, and she added, 'Yes.'

'My goodness !' began the Lady Doctor. 'He ?'

'Yes. My Pichai.'

Another pause.

'What about you, then ? And I to usurp your place ? I'll rather live a life-long recluse.'

'No, please !' Kamala's voice was pitched in a higher key.

'I am dazed,' said I.

'I too,' followed Sarada.

'This rare opportunity assures me now of martyrdom, coupled with these long years of my habituated resignation. Call upon me to sacrifice anything, brother, even you, for its sake. I realise my duty to the suppressed womanhood of India.'

'No, sister,' replied Sarada. 'You shall not desert him. I'll rather die than rob him of his happiness.'

I felt like being in a dreamland, confounded, and asked, 'Am I dreaming ?

'I'm really flabbergasted,' Sarada began again. 'I could defy any unholy law, but not snatch away a couple's happiness.'

'My dear sister,' argued Kamala, 'I'll deem you as no friend of mine, if you allowed yourself to be swayed from your act of service by sentiments regarding me. Widow as I am, I have still a wide market of bridegrooms to choose from, if I have an inclination to attain my matrimonial ambition. But what about you who is neither a widow nor a maid ? Have you any other choice or chance ? As for him,' and she faced me as she spoke, 'I release you from my bond and as a lover; with my proud arms, wave you on to the fight. You'll be affording me an opportunity for self-effacement for which even the conventional world will adore me ever after.'

'But this selfishness will eternally weigh my conscience down,' she said.

'No. Even posthumous fame may not be yours. The spiritual urgency of a martyr will, to the generality, seem no more than a special form of egotism. That is why humanity in history has always crucified its pioneers.'

Sarada was silenced.

'Am I to leave you thus lonely ?' I blurted out.'

'Never mind me ! The whole world will sympathise with me. It is you both who will be helpless !'

'Do you really think, sister,' asked Sarada, 'that there is enough foundation for this rebellious marriage you propose ?'

'Well, it is time for me now to be more frank. Half the failures in marriage are due to the fact that the women won't think beforehand and the men think too much afterwards. You, my dear brother, are dazzled by the glamour of a widow-marriage, and I was blinded by my own infatuation for you. Blind indeed should I continue to be, if I did not discover to-day a greater consuming fire between you both. I felt that you really belonged to her. The present which I have made of you to her does not, therefore, injure me in the least. It has raised me to a higher plane of life, wherefrom I can serve the

object of my love nobly and devotedly. On bended knees, I implore you both, not to deny me this pleasure!'

'Sister,' began Sarada.

Kamala cut her short. 'No, don't be sentimental. Let us face facts instead of illusions.'

'But how to answer your father and mine?' interrogated Sarada.

'Very good! That's business,' replied Kamala in satisfaction. 'Well, they need not know anything about this until the marriage is over. Leave the city and celebrate the marriage elsewhere—at Singaperumal Koil or Tirupati—and advertise the same in all the newspapers afterwards.'

'The man so often tarries on the verge of the right path, and the woman decides him,' said I. 'You are, therefore, playing with a dynamite, Kamala. Are you really in earnest?'

'Yes, trebly—in thought, word, and deed. And I entreat you, I pray you—I command you to do this for my sake!'

'What do you say, cousin?' I asked Sarada, when the door opened admitting the leaneyed figure of Mr E. T. S. Iyer.

'Come up, uncle, your rooms are upstairs.' And turning to me halfway in apparent carelessness, Sarada said, 'Yes, I obey her,' and vanished through the staircase, followed by Mr Iyer. The luggage was borne up by the chauffeur.

'What is this, Kamala?' I asked after a pause.

'The way to *my* happiness!' and she too vanished.

I heard, a moment later, a double peal of feminine laughter.

[*Of* Breaking the Rod *in the November issue of* THE SHORT STORY *Dr R. Nagaraja Sarma remarked that it had not a psychological rounding off. In the present story Mr Aundy continues the theme without making it in any way a sequel to his first story.* Daughter India *which will be published in our next number will give the final shape to what he wants to say. Ed.—S. S.*]

ATONEMENT

By NAVAGAR

'WHERE is your wristwatch, father?'

'Why, it's just nine. . . . But why are you standing out there in the balcony?'

'Nothing, father. It is so stuffy inside. I'm airing a little.'

The father smiled. 'Well, don't blush. You look so impatient. It is time, Krishnamurti must be here very soon.'

Young Rajam blushed and came into the room. She had finished the little domestic work she had—cooked, served food for her parents and herself had eaten. She had gone upstairs and set her dress in order in a minute. In the evening she had placed some jasmine on the picture of Lord Krishna. Part of it she took, placed on the photo of her husband and crowned with it the loosely-made knot of her luxuriant hair. Krishnamurti, her husband, lived at Kautuka, Mowbray's Road, Teynampet. He was the son of a flourishing business man of the city. It was about two years since he married Rajam, the attractive and accomplished daughter of Mr Sambasiva Iyer, a well-to-do retired government servant who had settled in Triplicane, primarily because of its proximity to the beach, which tonic he had prescribed to himself thrice a day, morning, evening, and night. Rajam was born late to her parents and was their only child. She stayed with her parents mostly. Krishnamurti would suddenly think of Rajam, jump into his car, shoot through the beach like a torpedo, and sound the electric horn and the rubber horn alternately and simultaneously at No.—Big Street, Triplicane. That day however, he had met his father-in-law in the Esplanade in the afternoon while shopping and had given notice of his call that night. So Rajam was not airing in the balcony but was trying to catch the sound of cars that might be heard in the vicinity. Krishnamurti was unusual in his delay that night.

As Rajam came in, her mother also came up from downstairs addressing Rajam's father: 'I suppose you are not leaving for your nocturnal marina round to-night. Rajam is leaving for Teynampet; you must stay at home.'

Sambasiva Iyer smiled. Rajam was waiting for Krishnamurti; Sambasiva Iyer for his young companion, Raghu; and Mrs Sambasiva Iyer for her dearest friend, sleep. Sambasiva Iyer asked, looking first at his wife and then at Rajam: 'How is it Raghu has not yet called? It is already our beach-time.'

Rajam replied that Raghu had left for the beach singly. When Rajam had set herself in form and appeared on the balcony to see if Krishnamurti was coming, the lithe silhouette of Raghu had passed by her house, turned, and beachward disappeared.

'How did the fellow know that I would not be able to go to the beach to-night?' said the father and the daughter replied: 'He knows things without anybody telling him.'

The last words of Rajam's reply were almost lost in the noise of electric horns and rubber horns. Krishnamurti's car swept into the Big Street like a storm, stopped with a yell, and roared like a hungry giant. Rajam glided down the stairs and opened the door. Krishnamurti raced up, stamping the stairs as if he were a police officer raiding the house of a suspected terrorist. The mother-in-law put in a few words of courtesy. She complained that the son-in-law was very unkind in calling every night after supper. She turned to her husband and

said: 'Please tell him that the next night he comes to take Rajam, he must be here early, have his supper and then go to Teynampet.'

Sambasiva Iyer turned round, looked at Krishnamurti, and thus mutely passed on the mother-in-law's invitation to the son-in-law. Krishnamurti hadn't time even to smile and rushed through a reply. The next minute he was at the steer, with Rajam by his side. The machine grunted, bumped, and was off, as if to break some record.

* * *

It was June and Madras was burning like an oven. Night had come like a big boon. Men had come out of their low houses and congested lanes into the Pycroft's Road and clustered at the betel bunks. Some of them were going to the beach to stretch themselves on the sands and roll like horses. Raghu was not going to the beach that night as an occasional, driven there by the day's heat. He was a great friend of the sea and visited it regularly. To him, the sea was like great art; it never staled. Poetry and philosophy ran in Raghu's veins. He was an M.A. of the Madras University and he bloomed into the finest flower of Hindu culture in spite of the University. When anybody asked him about his native place and parents, he would quote the Gita and say that his past and future were a mystery and the present alone known. The fact is, he lost his parents before he could know them. He was brought up till he became a graduate by a childless aunt of means who died suddenly, leaving him some money to fall back upon. Raghu was making his living as a *litterateur* in his vernacular. He did not worry himself or overwork. He had a natural poise and serenity. He was neither an intellectual nor an emotional; balance was born with him. Sambasiva Iyer came upon him casually; Raghu was his beach-find. The two had become inseparables very soon. Raghu became the favourite of the house of the sonless Sambasiva Iyer. He spent most of his afternoon hours at his old friend's house, reading to him Sanskrit Poetry, *Rambles in Vedanta*, and Sankara's Exposition of the Thousand Names of the Lord. The two talked or meditated upon what they read at home in their morning, evening, and night rambles along the beach.

Sambasiva Iyer could not accompany Raghu to the beach that night. Raghu had solitary communions with the sea occasionally, whenever Rajam went to her husband's and the old man stuck to his house to keep company with the old woman. Raghu reached the beach road. The lower double lights at the junction of the roads had attracted on the stone footwalls in the neighbourhood a few bare-bodied brahmin gentlemen, chewing, drying their hair, and subtly discussing the political situation. Occasionally a noise arose as if the waves were on the road itself and a car sped by, its two occupants inspiring interesting comments and speculations. A pushvan with a smoky light lay at one end vending beedies. Snuffing and severely criticising the latest Tamil Talkie, the brahmin waiter-boys of the Pycroft's Road restaurants were sitting on the footwall of the cement walk. The Aquarium restaurant was lighting the Radio area which was strewn with people stretched on their upperclothes and sandpillows. Raghu found the place too crowded and strolled along the wateredge northward.

* * *

Krishnamurti proposed to Rajam that they should have a drive along the marina, end to end, before going home. The car turned north and was doing slow motion. 'Do you learn driving? 'Why not? Try at the steer,' said Krishnamurti cleverly and with the pretext, drew Rajam close. The Iron Bridge went by and the War Memorial appeared in front. Krishnamurti rounded it in dead slow motion and then began to race again. Rajam pulled out the big silk kerchief which was peeping out of Krishnamurti's pocket. As she drew it, her eyes half-closed; she inhaled its perfume and with her eyes still closed, held it by the two ends with her

fingertips. Krishnamurti was looking at Rajam all the while with ardent eyes. His right hand was lightly placed on the steer, his left hand tightly round Rajam. He moved his face to hers. A gust of seawind blew the spread kerchief over his face. . .

The two fused faces received a rude shock. The wheel struck the pedestrians' walk, the car turned and stopped. There was a cry of anguish. Somebody had been struck down and wounded severely.

Krishnamurti jumped down. Rajam was frightened; she alighted from the car but could not bear to see the wounded body lying at the front wheel, half on the road and half on the walk. Krishnamurti looked about; there was no witness to the accident in the vicinity. He lifted the body into the car and was at his father-in-law's house in a minute.

* * *

It was eleven. Krishnamurti drove into Kautuka, Mowbray's Road, asked the servant to push the car into the shed, and went up. His younger sister was awake and asked him where *manni* was. His father was in his easychair engrossed in *The Hindu* and his mother who was waiting to receive her daughter-in-law accosted him: 'Where is your wife, Kittu?'

'Mother, I did not bring her with me. Her mother is unwell and I thought she had better stay with her mother. I just had a chat and came away.'

'Fever?' asked his father, removing his face-screen of *The Hindu* and sitting up.

'Not very high, father; but Rajam wanted to stay.'

'Of course, there is none else in the house.' And Kittu's father again sank behind *The Hindu*.

A couple of minutes passed and the father's voice broke in: 'You see here, Kittu; you drove into the bungalow just now in terrible speed. You are always reckless when you sit at the steer. *The Hindu* has reported a motor crash this evening in G. T.'

Krishnamurti shook. The mother chimed with the father: 'Yes, you drive so often to Triplicane in the nights to fetch Rajam; you must be very careful.'

Krishnamurti shook and made no reply. He retired into his room and threw himself on the bed.

* * *

It was 11 o'clock next morning. Raghu was lying in a room in the upstairs of Sambasiva Iyer's house. The doctor called. The doctor was a neighbour and a friend of Sambasiva Iyer. He took his seat on one side of Raghu's bed; Sambasiva Iyer on the other; Mrs Sambasiva Iyer was sitting on the floor at Raghu's feet; Rajam was standing straight in front of Raghu, leaning on the doorway.

'How did it happen?' asked the doctor.

It was late previous night. Sambasiva Iyer had quietly called his doctor friend for attending upon Raghu. The doctor had asked him not to disturb the patient and they did not talk about the accident at all. The doctor called at 11 next day to see his patient and to hear the story of the accident which all of them wanted to keep secret according to the wish of Krishnamurti. Raghu had just then opened his eyes after a long sleep. He said: 'Good morning, doctor.'

The doctor repeated his question, 'How did it happen?' addressing it now to Raghu himself. Raghu spoke in low and slow words, opening with a smile. 'I was in my usual nocturnal round in the marina, but without Sambasiva Iyer. I strayed towards the Iron Bridge and there I was standing at the south-eastern edge of the pedestrains' walk facing south. A car was on my back but I was dreaming. I was looking at the towers of the Senate House rising above the dark grove of trees at its foot and contemplating how beauti-

ul the adjacent ground would become when the new buildings of the University were finished. That was the last thing my mind knew. Perhaps, some drunkard-rake was driving with a prostitute. Thank God! He left me here in your house.' Saying this Raghu turned to Sambasiva Iyer. 'But how did anybody know that I should be brought here?' he asked.

Drunkard . . Rake . . Prostitute . . the words flew like shafts into Rajam's heart. Raghu uttered them most softly and with least bitterness of mind. Rajam thought that herself and her husband deserved those names. 'Why should we have behaved in that manner?' she thought within herself. If he wanted, Raghu could harm them; he could demand for justice, punishment, and compensation.'

'Raghu, the drunkard and rake was none else than my good son-in-law, Krishnamurti, and the prostitute, none else than this Rajam,' revealed Sambasiva Iyer. It was certainly a revelation to Raghu but it did not upset his mind in any manner. It removed even the slightest trace of bitterness from his heart.

'The accident was an accident,' remarked Raghu and applied with his eyes and soft words the necessary balm to Rajam's heart. 'You will kindly excuse me for calling you and your husband such bad names. I became vulgar suddenly,' he said to Rajam.

'Rajam and Krishnamurti must ask your pardon,' said Rajam's mother.

'Perhaps it was all my mistake; rather, who can help it? An accident must have happened to me last night. I should thank my stars that I was not killed.'

Rajam shuddered at the idea. She was looking at Raghu and thinking of the extreme goodness of his temperament and of his attitude towards things. The doctor smiled and remarked, 'You have come round to the main key—Karma, it is all Karma. Isn't that so? What an old mind for a modern youngster!'

Raghu replied to the doctor's small jeer: 'If such an attitude of the mind is not there, my dear sir, all the doctors can't cure man of his ills. Surgery and medicine cure only a fraction; philosophy cures the rest.'

Sambasiva Iyer pulled the talk from drifting away. He looked at Rajam: 'Rajam, you should have gone south; Teynampet is not in the north.' Anger was plain in the father's tone. Ashamed and almost breaking into tears, the poor girl narrated how the accident happened.

Raghu looked at Sambasiva Iyer and found him angry. 'I have read the *Rambles* to you in vain. When I myself who have suffered am free from bitterness, why should you fret?' the young *guru* asked the old *sisya*.

'I suffer more than you do. I love you, Raghu, more than I do Rajam.'

'I have always been warning you of the evil of more love to one.'

The doctor was not a doctor in philosophy. He took leave of the party. Sambasiva Iyer asked Raghu to take rest and left the room along with his wife and daughter. The three came down and were talking of the accident and the nature and extent of the wounds on Raghu's body.

Krishnamurti rolled and rolled on his bed all the night and he was mechanically sitting at his desk in his father's firm in the Armenian Street, G.T., till one o'clock next day. As the clerks rose up for lunch, he ran up in his car to Rajam's house. Rajam's father opened the door and Krishnamurti entered like an accused sentenced for murder. Rajam went in to prepare coffee.

'How is he?' opened Krishnamurti.

'He must be lying for a couple of months at least. He will be terribly defaced with cuts along his face. There is no loss of limb but his left leg is affected seriously.'

Sambasiva Iyer catalogued the injuries. Krishnamurti sank in sorrow. He had not moved intimately with

Raghu but he knew him and what he meant to his father-in-law. ' But don't worry; Raghu is such a nice fellow; he will not feel this at all.' Sambasiva Iyer consoled Krishnamurti, and consoled himself.

' But I feel it so much. I must see him now, see the wounds and beg his pardon.'

Sambasiva Iyer and Krishnamurti went up but Raghu was sleeping soundly. ' Don't disturb him; I will call in the evening again.' Krishnamurti hurried down and took leave. He could not see his wife, his partner in the crime they had committed against Raghu; and she also could not bring herself to see him. The mother-in-law brought a cup of coffee and a plate of roasted almonds. Krishnamurti took the former, asked his father-in-law not to let his parents know of the affair, and flew to his office.

* * *

Krishnamurti called in the evenings, read out the newspapers to Raghu, chatted and went home, some nights with Rajam and some nights singly. Rajam could not bear staying away from her house where Raghu was lying but she went to her husband's house regularly as usual so that she might not give room for anybody there to ask why she was not coming regularly. She became Raghu's nurse and was serving him for atonement. The accident made her father love Raghu all the more. He gave notice to the owner of the room where Raghu lived, paid up the rent due, and decided that Raghu was from that time a member of his household. Three months passed and Raghu was healed completely. Only he was looking awful; his face had taken terrible aspects; he was not able to use his left hand properly and was limping in his left leg.

* * *

The accident changed Raghu's life at the most critical moment. Horoscopes were pouring in for him and some gentlemen had already noted him down for final settlement in the next 'season'. They now went hunting after other boys. Raghu himself worried little on this point. He took that everything happened for his good. He himself had decided not to marry at all and make an unhappy girl feel till death that she had been mated to the most hideous youth on earth. Sambasiva Iyer was terribly upset over this consequence of the accident and the highly-sensitive Rajam was the first to realise how she had blasted a youth's life. She had admired Raghu for his natural gifts. She had revered him for his wisdom. She now felt herself as a servant of his, one bound to render him any service he demanded of her. She would feel for him and the pity would make her curse herself. Krishnamurti saw the decided change in Rajam. She was not jovial and sparkling as of old; did not use her jewels and dressed most plainly. She said to herself: ' I have no right to be happy when I have robbed one of happiness.'

Raghu had begun to work as of old, writing for the journals, stories in Tamil and philosophical musings in English. The father devoured every letter of the latter contributions of Raghu and the mother and daughter, of the former. Rajam would read the stories loudly to her mother, laugh, and praise Raghu in person. Previously, she had not talked directly very much with Raghu. She was now finding all sorts of occasions for talking with him. Raghu found that Rajam was developing on the wrong line.

Sambasiva Iyer sat for dinner one day. Raghu was upstairs waiting for Sambasiva Iyer to get ready. Rajam came up to call him. ' It is unnecessary for you to come up and call me for dinner. Father could have just called ' Raghu ' and I would have been down in a minute.'

Rajam shrank and felt damped. During dinner, Raghu said, ' I have proposed to do something.'

Sambasiva Iyer turned to him and Rajam was all attention. She was fearing what he might tell. Raghu conti-

nued: 'I am leaving this house and taking a room in G. T. You must all excuse me. I am going to stay with an old classmate of mine.'

'Have your dinner; don't be mad.' And Sambasiva Iyer looked up to Rajam to serve the food.

Another day at dinner, Raghu broke in a similar strain, but now with clearer significance and pain to Rajam. He told Mr and Mrs Sambasiva Iyer: 'You must engage a cook and not trouble any more young Rajam like this. She must be living happily in ease and luxury at her husband's mansion. Krishnamurti's mother should not be cheated of the pleasure of having with her in her own house her only daughter-in-law.'

'A cook we shall have, but why should not Rajam be with us as much as possible?' put in Rajam's mother. Rajam could not bear this. She had been finding that Raghu was for sometime trying to avoid facing her or talking with her. She had to leave for her husband's house the next day and her mother-in-law stayed her there for a whole fortnight.

* * *

'You are so dejected, Rajam; you must not betray anything to my mother. She asked me this morning why you have suddenly turned sad now.' Clasped in closest embrace, Krishnamurti and Rajam were lying on their bed, cheek upon cheek. Krishnamurti spoke stroking her hair with one palm and tried to kiss the sorrow off her face. Rajam responded and after a time spoke, her hot tears descending on Krishnamurti's face. 'We have blasted the life of a youth; rather, I have; it was I that pulled out the kerchief which was the cause of the accident.'

'I fully realise the sin we have committed. What a fine fellow Raghu is! I do not know how we can make up for the wrong we have done him.'

'I have decided. . . .' Without completing the sentence Rajam sat up. She could not continue for some minutes. How could she say those words? How could she speak that idea of her heart to her wedded husband and lord of her soul and body? She loved Krishnamurti and was most devoted to him. Krishnamurti asked her to speak her heart. 'You asked me not to betray anything to mother; why didn't you ask me not to betray anything to you?'

'Because there is no secret between us; there cannot be any.'

'Of course, but now . . .'

'What has happened now?'

'My love for you is firm as a rock. It has however grown, expanded. I must not hide from you that I have voluntarily made my heart take another image to be enshrined there. I see yourself in the second image. I adore both.'

'What is this mystifying talk in general?'

'It is not a question of "I love him"; it is one of "I *must* love him". You shall permit me to-night to make amends to him for the sin we have committed against him. He shall share me with you.'

'You are strange, Rajam. I never dreamt of this turn. You shock me. How could one love two or love the two equally? Declare that you have ceased to value virtue. Don't quibble and dress up your evil resolve in arguments. Oh, you are subtle beyond my notion!'

'I am not subtle; I am blunt and hence it is that I am begging of you to . . .'

'Pshaw! you suggest you would be carrying on!'

'Dear, don't insult your honoured wife. I am not falling down; I am rising in stature. I am making a sacrifice.'

'How evil of that wretched fellow to insist on such compensation!' Krishnamurti who had also sat up during this exchange sank on his pillows, exasperated.

Rajam caught his feet and begged him not to abuse Raghu. 'Don't for a

moment entertain the idea that Raghu loves me or gives hints of any sinister design. He is a saint. Another in his position would exploit the situation but Raghu is too noble for it. I have told you, I do not love him ; I owe him, we owe him. . . . He has avoided remaining with me many times and cut me short when I had tried to speak to him. He had asked my father to send me away to your house here permanently and proposed that he himself must leave the house to live separately and far away.'

'Then, it is plain *you* are erring. If you are not absurd and mad, you are above me.' Krishnamurti's voice was such that it showed they should stop there. He turned and buried his head in his pillows. Rajam threw herself at his feet. Night passed away, burying deep within its womb this momentous conversation of the couple.

The night's conversation extended Rajam's stay at her husband's house indefinitely. Lest his father-in-law should feel Rajam's absence and think that she was unwell, Krishnamurti called on him one evening. He stayed for supper. Raghu dragged him into conversation. While Krishnamurti was talking stiltedly, Raghu spoke with freedom and ease. Krishnamurti began to take him for a deep fellow, a villain, whose good-mannered and disarming exterior was only a subtle technique for a sinister purpose nurtured in the interior of the heart. But he discovered soon that he was mistaken. Raghu was unbelievably good, almost an impossible man. One never met him in life.

'How is Rajam ?' asked Raghu, as the two were going to the beach after supper, Sambasiva Iyer coming a few yards behind them.

'She is so depressed in spirits ; she is eternally thinking of you and of the crime we have perpetrated upon your person. She weeps every night and makes me weep too as she speaks of how you have been defaced and disfigured.'

'I am so free in mind, now that she is staying away at your house. I asked her father to send her away to your house. She will soon forget me and the accident. Why should you two worry yourself over the affair, while I say with all sincerity that it has not affected me in the least ?'

'Raghu, you are so good, so great ; you are a mahatma.'

'Please, please, don't make me superior. I am your friend and equal.'

The two were silent for some minutes. Raghu opened again : 'But why don't *you* be calling now and then ?'

'I will call to-morrow evening ; we shall go to some picture.'

'You mean Cinema ?'

'Yes, talkie.'

'Excuse me. I am not showing myself out. I have stopped my morning visits to the beach because I fear people seeing me first in the morning may take me for an ill-omen for the day. The whole day, I stick to my room, saving my face from the world. I stalk about the beach at nights like this with your father-in-law.'

Krishnamurti could not but weep. He cursed himself and almost fell at his feet and begged pardon. Raghu chided him and lifted him up.

It was half past eleven and the telephone bell rang at Kautuka, Mowbray's Road. Krishnamurti's father heard somebody calling from a Triplicane dispensary. 'Father, I am staying to-night here at my father-in-law's house ; I am coming there early morning.' It was strange unexpected news for Rajam. A thousand ideas crowded and made havoc of her mind. Her heart beat like a trumpet and gasping, she tossed on the bed. 'Why did I reveal my heart to my husband ? He is impetuous and rash as the car he drives. Perhaps, he has rushed at Raghu and the two have picked up a terrible row.' The idea was too poignant ; she sobbed, she rolled on the bed, she sat up, she stalked like a ghost in her room and

exhausted fell asleep on the floor in the small hours of the morning.

***

Next morning Krishnamurti told his mother that Rajam's parents wanted her at their home for a day at least. He himself took her there *en route* to his office. As he was driving, he was speaking with a heart, light with ease. Rajam was all anxiety. She had just asked him the cause of his unusual stay for the night at his father-in-law's house. She kept silent afterwards. Her husband was delivering a long soliloquy on Raghu's goodness and greatness, his sterling character. As the car stopped at No.—Big Street, Krishnamurti had just finished his panegyric on Raghu. 'He is not of ordinary clay; he is of no clay at all; some poet created him, not with his hands, but with his mind; a philosopher must have conceived him as an idea.'

Krishnamurti horned. Sambasiva Iyer opened the door. Rajam stepped out of the car. 'I am in a hurry to the office.' And Krishnamurti was off before Rajam had entered her house. He drove along the marina. The sea was sparkling and the wind and the rubber tyres running on the tarred road were making a pleasant sound. He had become a second admirer of Raghu. He was outdoing his wife in the speech he delivered to her. He was sure he could trust Raghu as a father. He wanted to leave Rajam for a week with her parents and see how things developed.

As Rajam came up, Raghu asked her mother if her daughter was doing well. Rajam replied, resenting plainly, even in her mother's presence, this indirect inquiry of Raghu. The mother smiled. Raghu at once called Sambasiva Iyer to his seat and began his reading and exposition. The two gentlemen got engrossed in each other's remarks on the texts they were perusing and the two ladies were left to spend the time as they pleased. In utter disgust, Rajam took her mother downstairs. Downstairs, the mother soon fell asleep. It was rather hot and Sambasiva Iyer proposed that he be granted permission for a short nap. The young *guru* smiled and granted. Sambasiva Iyer retired to the adjacent room and soon began to snore.

Rajam sat and sat in the kitchen, in the front room and at all possible places downstairs, trying to do all sorts of things. She could not bear it any longer. She came up and stood before Raghu who was absorbed in weaving out his weekly Tamil short story. His head was bent over his writing pad and never lifted itself up, conscious though it was of the person standing in front.

'What is the theme of your present story, sir?' asked Rajam in affected respect.

'It is about nothing in particular; there is of course one boy, one girl, a marriage—things like these. . . .'

'You celebrate so many marriages on paper; when are you going to marry?'

'If I marry, you may be sure of getting an invitation. I will not cheat you.'

'But I fear you are cheating yourself. You are writing stories mechanically. You have least understanding of what you write upon. Your experience of life is fragmentary. You affect philosophy and monkishness at too early an age. This early extremism will wreak vengeance on you and you will one day swing to the other extreme. Why not be a normal man?'

'Stop, stop. You are a clever girl. You pour out like a torrent and you have successfully drawn me out of my shell. But, this is the first time I hear anybody calling me abnormal. That is the last thing I am.'

'Well, I do not want to cross swords with you. You will begin to scintillate and I am no equal to you in argument. I put it plainly and straightly. You must marry.'

'Marry? Why, it is my concern.'

'No, it is purely my concern. If you do not marry, I am going to renounce my marital happiness and vow a life of . . .'

'Enough of this nonsense. Why should I be the dust in your eye ? Let not your life be a wreck because of me.'

'But we have, I have, been the dust that has deprived you of your eye. I have wrecked your life. If you do not mean to marry, you mean to keep me on the rack, you mean to, you mean to . . . '

'I don't mean anything. You mean a lot of unnecessary things. I have tried to discourage and you have courted my company and conversation unnecessarily.'

'Excuse me, Raghu. By depriving yourself volunatrily of this happiness, you put down myself as the sinner responsible for that determination of yours. The sin will haunt me until I work out that Karmà and go through its results. I place myself at your service.' And she came nearer.

Raghu was taken aback. He looked at her sternly with all the sternness his defaced countenance was capable of. She was frightened at his look. He quieted himself, drew back, and remarked: 'This girl really beats the missionaries in her interpretation of our doctrine of Karma.'

The father woke just at this juncture and caught the words, "doctrine of Karma". As he came to Raghu's room, he saw there Raghu and Rajam appearing as if got into a hot discussion.

'You seem to have been discussing something ?'

'Yes, your daughter wants to learn the principles of Hindu view of Life; and she has already understood the doctrine of Karma most easily !.'

'What! I am still to understand it with anything like clarity.'

'She has even learnt its application to life!'

'She is a precocious girl; I have watched it even in her schooldays.'

'Yes, too precocious; but I noted it only just now.'

'But, Rajam, it is long since we took coffee prepared by you. Please go down and get us coffee as soon as possible.'

Rajam dragged herself down the stairs and into the kitchen. She gave the finest coffee that noon. It was followed up by the best supper she or anybody had ever cooked. Night came like a big boon and though the day was very hot and there was every reason for going out to the beach, Sambasiva Iyer wanted to stay at home to talk with his daughter sundry things about her stay at her husband's house, sundry things of her father-in-law, the mother-in-law, the servant there, the dog there, etc., etc.

'But I am going. I was visiting my dearest friend, the sea, thrice in those days. I cannot afford to stop away from the single visit which only I am able to pay nowadays. So, good bye to you, and to you two also.' Raghu's eye passed from Sambasiva Iyer to his wife and lastly to his daughter. 'I suppose Rajam is leaving for Teynampet to night,' said Raghu as he descended the stairs.

'No, I am staying here, staying for a week at least.'

Raghu did not wait for the reply. He was unmindful of what Rajam said, of what Rajam might say. He was going.

Turning into the Pycroft's Road, Raghu reached the marina. The Radio area was too crowded; some night-spirits were in gala at the Aquarium restaurant. Raghu quietly turned northward and walked. Raghu was going.

* * *

'What exactly was he ailing from ?'

'He was ailing curiously. You may not believe. Your son here will understand. Ask him.' So said Rajam to her mother-in-law who asked her one night two and a half years afterwards about her father's death which took place some time before that. Rajam's mother was

always weak and she had preceded her father.

'Raghu's sudden disappearance was a blow to him. A son's loss never broke a father in that manner,' said Krishnamurti.

'I suppose the boy committed suicide. There is a suicide-wave among the youth now,' remarked his father.

'Raghu is no neurotic,' said Krishnamurti.

'And we never knew of this Raghu at all.' Krishnamurti's father spoke from his easychair, removing his face-screen of *The Hindu*.

'Raghu was almost a son to Sambasiva Iyer,' said Krishnamurti.

'Yes, he was my elder brother really,' said Rajam.

'I see. That is why you insisted that your firstborn boy should be named Raghu,' remarked the mother-in-law.

Rajam looked at baby Raghu in her lap. She smiled at it and touched its chin and lip. The baby kicked up its little limbs and wreathed its face with smiles.

'Get it here,' said her mother-in-law.

'Here,' said the father-in-law, throwing aside *The Hindu* with the words: 'The city has nowadays no news except car accidents.'

A LION who had caught a Mouse was about to kill him when the Mouse said:—

'If you will spare my life, I will do as much for you some day.'

The Lion goodnaturedly let him go. It happened shortly afterwards that the Lion was caught by some hunters and bound with cords. The Mouse, passing that way and seeing that his benefactor was helpless, gnawed off his tail.

AMBROSE BIERCE

SEASHELLS

By MANJERI S. ISVARAN

SWIFTER than a weaver's shuttle the days had flown, faster than beads told by a holy man; but Sorrow's foot is shod with lead and Time is not with her. And Syamala's days were heavy as lead and as lustreless.

Syamala was beautiful; arms and neck of sumptuous jasmine; hair, soft unbraided dusk; but why should she be beautiful? Her bosom did not throb with the warmth of life like the slowly swelling bud in the light of the sun; the twin birds there which had been once clamourous in the wind of joy were hushed by a sudden calm. Fancies were flogged down, fancies of a lovely young wife; her eyes were two great teardrops and held complete dominion over her face.

The little domesticities for the day over, Syamala sat in her room. Through the door she could see the kitchen lit from a corner by the crimson heart of the oven; the vessels sparkling clean on the shelves, and the spoons and ladles hanging through the loops of a cord nailed to the wall. The kitchen was her pride and paradise; in it she forgot a little of her sorrow.

Evening swelled out its shadowy balloon; her brother would be home from the office presently, and her mother from the temple. The lady of the adjacent house stood on the threshold talking with the milkman who was milking the cow; in the verandah of the house a group of girls were noisily engaged in a game of knucklebones; the road in front was the continual twang of a bowstring, pleasure cars rushing to the seaside; and on Syamala's ears the noises fell like music by an unpractised hand on a harmonium. Rude music, because she was ever concerned with her solo on the strings of pain.

'Syamala!' It was her mother calling from outside. She could hear her talking softly, caressively in baby language punctuated with the worshipful names of the Lord.

She opened the door.

'Syamala,' the mother said, 'has not your brother come home yet?'

The question was unnecessary and she knew it. But the mother-heart always asks for the son and goes on calling him though he be present or absent.

'Have you finished your work, dear?'

'Yes, mother.'

In the meantime the boy of three who was biting at a piece of cocoanut kernel had jumped down from the old woman's hip and run towards Syamala. He was Syamala's son.

The grandmother looked at the child with reproachful eyes but the reproach was one of pure joy. And she said: 'I am my darling's horse whenever he wants to ride. Is not that so?'

The boy smiled and shrouded his face in his mother's bosom. Suddenly he darted back, gave a kiss on his grandmother's cheek, a kiss that was a peck, and was again by the side of his mother.

'Come, come,' he chirped, and dragged Syamala to her room.

Soon the grandmother was in her world with the rosary of *rudraksa* in her hands.

'Where are my dolls?' the boy presently asked and his mother gave him the dolls to play.

The toy motorcar lay on its side without two of its wheels; the squeaking mouse did not squeak because he had bitten off the button; the rubber ball was involuted and lay like a cup.

'Play,' his mother said.

And he played.

She sat watching him, a tenderness like bloom over an apple spreading over

her face. But it was the tenderness of melancholy. Syamala was slowly forgetting herself and escaping into a land of her own. She caught the profile of her child and started . . .

'Syamala! Syamala!' Her husband stood by her side gazing ardently at her.

Three years slipped from her and she was seventeen again. It was in the middle of the night and they were in the bedchamber. She moaned in pain and he tried to console.

'Why do you go on like this? Moaning and complaining, moaning and complaining all the twenty-four hours of the day? Can't you forget? A woman can forget?' His voice huskily persisted.

'Forget, forget! Oh, how could I? My first-born, my darling, I have lost him and I can't get over the agony,' she wailed.

'And talking always of this to the neighbouring women and shedding tears—is this the way to fulfil yourself?'

'You don't know what it is for a woman to lose her first-born. The agony is unbearable. Only another woman can understand and sympathise.'

'Strange! That's why you don't admit me into your sorrow. But it is as much my child as your own.'

'True, but you have forgotten it all. Man easily forgets. He has a thousand things to be attracted by. *You* go about cheerfully.'

'Yes. Youth must not be wasted in unreasonable sorrow. You and I are still young and the moments of desire for us are many. I can thrill you and awake you to enormous joys.

'She was slowly forgetting herself and escaping into a land of her own.'

We can have children . . . and the child in the pit is really in the lap of its mother, as I have heard the wise women say,' he whispered and drew her gently to his side . . .

Syamala shook herself up; her boy was tugging at her saree. There was a rattle, and at her feet was scattered a number of bright seashells.

'Look, mother, look,' the boy cried, striking a couple of shells that made a clucking sound when struck.

Syamala stood in silence, her eyes wildly glaring. While she sat immersed in herself her boy had taken from the windowsill the box of seashells and strewn them on the floor. She looked at the shells and even while looking a sob escaped her lips. It was like the estranging sob of the sea. For into the sea her husband had gone while bathing on a day when there was an eclipse of the moon. The priest had said that the Serpent had hitched its tail to his (her husband's) star and for redemption he should bathe in the sea with the charm of the palmyra leaf tied over his brow. And he had gone to bathe and to become a spirit in the glaucous cavern of the sea; naked he did not come into the world again. The shells were collected by him as exquisite specimens; he was a student of geology. The posthumous child played with the shells calling to its mother, and did his call tell her that he would share her sorrow?

Syamala stood nowhere though she was standing in the room, her young shoulders bent under a hump of pain. Her child looked with fear and mistrust at her aloofness and grew itself aloof. Night had fallen dark; angel hands were strewing sequins all over the sky in jubilee. There was a knock at the house door; then the shuffle of sandalled feet and voices in conversation. Syamala heard her brother calling her; her mother repeating the call. And she was of the earth again.

"If your cutyam nose & look up lo! the gods are ranged before you in the sky"

केऽकातीत उवा, मर्थं मध्यारोप्य विवर्धित: ।
श्रोऽयं स्त्रे नाति तुष्यन्ति विदग्धा नेतरे जना: ॥

Morbid mystery mongering.

affected pauses & poses
sentimental whispers & gestures
All to mystify the bankruptcy of the feminine mettle

THE AWAKENING

By M. S. K.

IT was the 31st day of March 1924. The day had begun hot and continued to be so. The sky above lay like a lid on a steaming vessel and the sun looked like a big ball of fire which consumed everything that came within its reach.

It would be about 2 o'clock of the day when Mukhyapranan rose from his chair, took the flask containing his noonday coffee from the drawer of his table, and was making for the record room of the office, (the office had no tiffin room) where he usually took his lunch forgetting for the time being everything about T. A. Bills, I. T. Schedules revenue deposits, civil deposits etc., etc., when a peon came running to him from the Tahsildar's room saying that he was wanted by the Tahsildar urgently. Mukhyapranan was a wholetime government servant and he knew this well, and on entering service he had read the Government Servants Conduct Rules very well. And being a wholetime government servant he knew that he had to obey the orders of the Tahsildar immediately even without taking his scanty lunch.

Mukhyapranan after graduating himself from the Presidency College in 1922 with a double second (there was no 3rd part in those days) had entered government service as a clerk in the Taluk Office of M—with the roseate vision of retiring at least as a Deputy Collector with a magnificent pension of Rs. 400 per mensem. Mukhyapranan had passed out young from the college, he was only 19, and was dreaming of gorgeous days ahead. Though a clever youth he had abandoned the idea of appearing for any competitive examination being in poor circumstances. His father who was a clerk in the Collectorate of M—had died in harness while he was at the college and he had completed his collegiate education with the help of a munificent uncle of his. And the uncle had helped him only with the ultimate idea of giving his daughter in marriage to him. He had only his mother to be looked after. Ever since his father's death his mother had developed a kind of disease which had become chronic and she was hovering between this world and the next. Such was the position of Mukhyapranan.

When the peon came running to him from the Tahsildar's room he placed the flask in the drawer of his table and made fast to answer the call. He could see when he entered that the Tahsildar was working himself to anger and when he stepped in with a Good-day, the Tahsildar instead of returning it as courtesy required snorted and bawled out, 'You have not put up the connected papers in this case. You have also delayed the paper for a pretty long time. You should think that you are now a clerk in a Government office and not a graduate of the Madras University.' He emphasised the word clerk, and clerks know why an emphasis is placed upon that word. Mukhyapranan was the only graduate in the Taluk office. The Tahsildar was not a graduate and he did not know what a University career meant.

Mukhyapranan was taken aback but he said, 'Sir, I respect the position you occupy but my being a graduate and all that has nothing to do with the business on hand. I have sufficiently developed a sense of responsibility ever since entering service and I know my position. I have put up the connected papers and action has been taken on the paper with the least possible delay.' Mukhyapranan after entering service had got into the groove and getting into the groove means talking officialeese and reducing everything to the official standard.

The Tahsildar was just on the eve of retirement. He had become a Tahsildar only two years back and was still officiating. He was a matriculate and had entered service as a clerk on Rs. 15. In those days clerks were started only on Rs. 15 which has come to stay at Rs. 30 after a series of somersaults. The Tahsildar had seen service under so many officers, Provincial and Civilian, and had in his time pocketed many a rebuke. He was spending a few of those rebukes he had received, now that he had come to occupy a position from which he could administer rebukes and award blackmarks.

The Tahsildar was stunned by the reply of Mukhyapranan. He had never expected such a reply. He found out that what Mukhyapranan had said was true. The connected papers had been put up and there was absolutely no delay too. The Tahsildar instead of apologising to Mukhyapranan for his curt remarks dismissed him with an air of disdain. Apologies are not for them. They are infallible and if any mistake happens it is the poor clerk who is responsible. The worries of clerks are too many and they are a poor cursed lot with nobody to sympathise with them. Better to be a murderer than a clerk. Mukhyapranan was not the least perturbed over the Tahsildar's attitude. He took it calmly, he had had such things before from the previous officers. After returning from the Tahsildar's room he had his coffee, constitutional, and noonday smoke and resumed his seat again at three.

The 31st of March is a busy day in the Taluk offices. It is the last day of the official year. The land revenue collections from the villages should be as far as possible completed on that day though it may extend up to 30th June, the last day of the fasli year. On that day the Taluk office looks like the market on a shandy day.

The revenue collections from the villages were pouring in. The shroffs were working double time. The head accountant was busy. The Tahsildar was busy. The clerks were busy. The peons were busy. The Taluk office was buzzing with life. It would be about 5 P.M. The collections from the villages were still pouring in. The day continued to be sultry. The sun was getting down behind the hillocks that could be seen from the Taluk office compound,quite oblivious of the busy air in the Taluk office. Dusk was gathering in. Lights were brought in and the clerks began to work in the lamplight. Darkness enveloped the whole compound and the Taluk office with the sub jail near by assumed a sombre appearance. There was a brooding silence everywhere. The Taluk office stood in the dark and looked on complacently at the darkness around.

Mukhyapranan was working in the treasury section. He was the daybook-clerk and was working at shorthand speed. He paused for a while in his work and yawned. He was getting weary, morose. The thought of the *contretemps* in the afternoon coupled with that of his ailing mother at home began to get on his nerves. He was utterly done up ; he grew giddy and sat for a time still.

It might be about eight in the night when a boy whom he recognised to be his neighbour's son rushed to him saying that his mother was bad, very bad. Mukhyapranan was dazed. The things around him began to appear to him as whirling in a fantastic dance. He was feeling feverish, his soul was on fire. He closed the daybook, placed it on the table, and made straight for the Tahsildar's room.

TheTahsildar was busy going through the papers and did not notice him when he entered. He coughed an apologetic cough to attract attention when the Tahsildar looked up from the papers before him. He saw Mukhyapranan standing before him with a carecreased face. Immediately his mind reverted to the incident of the afternoon and he said, ' What do you want?'

'Sir,' said Mukhyapranan, ' I have received information just now that my

mother is in a very bad state. I want to go home and see how she is.'

'No,' snapped the Tahsildar. 'To-day is the 31st of March and don't you know that we have much work to do? You are the treasury clerk, eh, aren't you? Who is to close the entries in the daybook? You have to stand by and do your duty. I can't allow you to go now. Your mother cannot be in such a critical state. I know that we Indians have a knack for magnifying little things big. You better go and attend to your work. Tell the head accountant that I am coming now to the strong-room to make arrangements to have the money counted.'

Mukhyapranan said, tears streaming down his face, 'Sir, it is a matter of life and death. My mother has been in a very bad state for the past so many days and something tells me that she is slowly sinking now. So allow me to go.'

'No,' snapped the Tahsildar and sat mum.

Mukhyapranan was much agitated. His nerves were in a violent paroxysm. He underwent a complete metamorphosis. He forgot himself and said, 'You are a brute,' and dashed out of the room.

He came to his seat, wrote out on a slip of paper his resignation, placed it on his table, took the flask from the drawer and made for the doorway. This had taken place so quickly that nobody had noticed his exit, and by the time the Tahsildar had come storming into the strong-room asking for Mukhyapranan, he was a hundred yards away from the Taluk office. Another clerk was deputed to do his work and when he came to his seat he saw the letter of resignation on the table. The Tahsildar was vowing vengeance on Mukhyapranan when his letter of resignation was handed over to him. But when he had read it he sat aghast in his chair.

Meanwhile Mukhyapranan was racing homewards. The night was dark and nobody could be seen. A hot land-breeze was blowing and the old dried leaves falling from the trees crunched eerily. The few stars that were twinkling only made drearier the dreary sculpture of the sky.

Trembling and perspiring all over, he staggered into the house. A low moan came from a far-away part of the house. He clutched at his heart, wiped off the sweat on his brow and rushed to where the noise came from.

'Mother!' he called in a voice tearful and remote. There was no response. The moan behind the bedclothes stopped a little; then all at once began to rattle.

'Mother!' he whispered again thrusting down the lump in his throat.

'Mother!' echoed the room. The silence was hoarse. It was throttled. A moment later it was painfully vocal. Mukhyapranan was sobbing, whilst outside the night like a negress grinned and combed her tresses through the branches of the trees.

*

Ten years later.

In the village of M—the people were busy with the elections to the Assembly. A band of youngsters with placards hanging down their necks were lustily bawling, cheerfully welcoming. Cars purred, horns honked, and leaflets floated like paper-kites in summer. Over all the confusion and babel of voices one name rose ringing and strident: 'Vote for Mukhyapranan!' The air was charged with it. Youngster after youngster caught the cry and spread its rumour far and near.

Ten days later when the District Collector of M—counted the votes, Mukhyapranan topped the polls.

THE UNINVITED

By

M. GOPAL RAO

' Sita had whisperd into his ear something that was distinctly distasteful to him.'

CHIDAMBARAM lived in Mylapore, and as he drove home that night he would have welcomed a fatal accident, cheerfully. The prospect of telling Sita was not alluring. The nearer he approached his home the less he liked it. Sita was such an affectionate, worthy creature, and so devoted to him and to the children. If ever he complained about the *sambar* or some minor domestic detail, and if she felt that this reflected upon her in any way, she was wont to dissolve into copious but noiseless tears. He would have preferred her sorrow to be at least articulate. To a woman who sobbed audibly as most women do, you could at least say, ' There, there,' or something pacifying like that, but to a woman, and that your wife, who stared at you with respectful and streaming eyes without making a sound —well, it used to get on his nerves.

Chidambaram wondered how Sita would take it. The more he thought of it, the more despicable his conduct appeared to him to be. And what

would his Suppu think—his Suppu seventeen now, in the Intermediate class. Chidambaram had little love for his children, but in his kindly way, he hated to hurt Suppu. At the children's invitation, he often joined them in their games, but he always felt extremely foolish. They loved him individually and collectively. Collectively in particular. He would have liked one child —or two perhaps. But seven! That was too many. Transgressing the limit, any decent limit. But Sita wanted them, and he could well afford sixteen if it came to that. He devoutly hoped it would never come to that.

Only that morning, Sita had whispered into his ear, something that was distinctly distasteful to him. He had scratched his head, plucked at his grey moustache, and looked cross. As he thought of that, he shuddered.

'I have got something to tell you,' said Sita, in the morning before he left in his car to his office.

'Well?'

'Something very beautiful,' said Sita softly. A shudder ran through Chidambaram. He seemed to remember having heard something like that before.

'Well?' he inquired again, and his voice trembled noticeably.

Sita looked proud.

'Can't you guess?' she whispered again.

He looked up into the eyes of his faithful wife. He moistened his lips to speak, but could not frame a word.

'Ah, I'm so glad you're glad,' said Sita breathlessly (Glad! God! he hadn't felt glad at all then). Seems almost two now, and I do so love a tiny baby!'

She returned to her seat and resumed knitting. 'What was it *you* were going to tell *me*?' she inquired.

'Oh, nothing.'

Well, that was how he got the news.

*

It was a stifling night in late August. Chidambaram sat with his shirt off, the banian chinging to him with perspiration. Great beads of sweat pured off his face. He tired to read a book, but his thoughts intruded continuously. He was loathing himself to-night. Upstairs, so he figured, his wife was fighting for her life giving birth to his child, and here he was chafing at the queer incongruities of life. What a mess he had made of it?

Why on earth had he ever married Sita? Sita was a nice girl. He was quite sure that she had never kissed her own children with such warmth as distinguished their embraces. Anyway, he had drifted into marriage with her, and she had made him a good wife. She told him that she worshipped him and he believed her.

In much the same way he had become the father of six lusty children, to which number a seventh was now about to be added. He hadn't wanted any children particularly. He never knew what to say to them. They made him uncomfortable. And Sita always insisted upon discussing all their childish ailments with him. He was constantly being tortured by the recitals of Seenu's gastric infelicities, of the liver that didn't seem to stop but ever persist in enlarging itself, despite Jammi's treatment, and of Meenu's out-growing canine. Chidambaram never had the heart to tell Sita that these details not only irritated but nauseated him. He used to listen to her attentively, and even forced himself to ask questions which he knew would precipitate a further flood of anatomical reminiscence.

During the great plague epidemic Sita used to read to him paragraphs in the paper telling where entire families had been wiped out by the scourge.

'Isn't that awful?' she would say. 'Just think—here's a case where a father and ten children all died within a week! Oh, it's too horrible! Just imagine if anything should happen to one of ours!'

'Please don't imagine anything of the sort,' said Chidambaram, hurriedly and rather thickly, 'it's morbid!'

Nevertheless he used to read similar paragraphs every day with a rather wistful enjoyment, loathing himself. 'Just

imagine if anything should happen to one of ours !'. . .Yes. . . Just imagine !

The sound of the doorknob turning startled him, and he ran to open it. The midwife stood there, bland and professionally cheerful.

'It is a daughter, sir.'

A daughter. A shiver ran up his nerves. A daughter—good heavens! That meant no good. Why a daughter? She could have given him a son rather. Daughters! They are leeches, bloodsuckers. He was not at all disposed to agree with his friend, S. V. V. now. S. V. V. had once declared that he had several sons, and daughters also. Daughters (and S. V. V. in his infinite relief evidently, had thanked God too. Why, Chidambaram could not divine) aren't so much of a bother nowadays as sons. This was rot, that man had not had his experience, he felt fully convinced. Positively certain too.

Sita had simply no business to add another to the already crumbling institution. It was preposterous.

*

In the middle of the night, a fortnight later, Sita turned in her bed and woke. She was a light sleeper and she found the garden gate open.

She got out of bed, switched on the light and went to her husband's room. But he was not there. The dim light revealed to her quick eyes a strange eloquence, whose details she could not gather. She went to the kitchen, hesitated, and stepped in. But in that moment of hesitation she felt all her nerves suddenly break and the bones straighten up. Summoning up her courage, she went out into the garden. The pale moon dazzled upon her face, which was so pale it might have been taken for a phantom.

At the extremity of the garden, there was a small shed in which two cows and one baffalo were penned. It was not provided with a window at all but as she approached it, she thought she saw a window open. The shed was plunged in semidarkness; there was no light within. But suddenly a lamp flickering somewhere in its interior threw its small and insufficient rays without and a dark figure stood for a moment at the window.

Sita shuddered. She faintly heard a cold screeching noise.

It was no wonder that a lady so courageous, but now disturbed by the two strongest human passions—love for him, and at the same time, fear, and confusion for having offended him. (She thought she had mortally wounded his pride). She was wakened even to the indulgence of superstitious ideas. She thought she heard the wings of the phantom flap at sight of her; her disturbed mind told her so—yet this became an irresistible reality, and by one of those incomprehensible transports of fear and hatred, she bounded from her place and with two strides, crossed the garden and passing the kitchen, turned round once again and glanced at the window. The figure had disappeared; there was no light and still more wonderful, no window either.

She was mad—a good deal puzzled. She had never seen an apparition any time before this. In the quiet solitude of her room, she felt extremely ungrateful. There was her husband who hadn't wanted any children at all. She had disappointed him, nay, she had inflicted on him a wound which was heavy and incurable. She looked at the wall, and at herself. The shadow was strangely distorted. She wondered if she also appeared grotesque. She could not determine it. But she was satisfied inwardly that every shadow looked strange. Near the mirror stood a chair. She sat on it and fell into a reverie.

Then, of a sudden, she heard a cry. It was that same screech once again. She waited in a state of expectancy, for that noise disturbed her reverie. And to her own surprise, instead of exhibiting even the slightest trace of tear or tremulousness, she merely sat cool and not even pale.

'That's his voice—so familiar,' she breathed, and in heaviness of soul rose

and started down the steps. But half-way down, she was startled by a hurrying shape, hooded in a white sheet. The shape pushed her gently aside and slid down the railing of the staircase, with singular case. Sita looked at it, nervously, comprehendingly, thought of many things flitting through her mind, and then hid her face in her outstretched palms.

That was undoubtedly a phantom.

*

Chidambaram reached his wife's room and in her absence, took the bedsheet from off the cot and flung it over his head. He descended the steps, and half-way he stopped. Sita was standing as if in a trance facing the kitchen door. He wrapped the bedsheet closely around him, and pushing her aside, slid down the railing. The garden was still. As he turned round near the shed in the garden, he caught a glimpse of the light in her room. A change had come over his face. He crept through the door into the street. He was going out for good.

The night was pleasant he having only thought of his escape, but the dazed recollection of the child's birth reminded him for a moment that it was his child who had been the cause of the mischief. Its first cry was still in his ears and no doubt it had aroused him to a new misery. He felt a strong desire to look back once again at the house but on second thoughts, he abstained from such a profanation, as he considered it.

He was plunged in an abyss of the most tender thoughts.

He walked along the South Mada Street to the temple. In his infinite mistry he had found occasion to think of going to the temple.

Noises of the street were now tread-on the heels of dawn. At the corner, he could feel the warm and very inviting smell of Sastry's hotel. The perspiration had dried on his forehead. He had spent a sleepless night, and that strangely enough he did not feel in the least sleepy.

He began to think again of Sita, eager, passionate, and stimulating Sita. Perhaps she would understand.

His thoughts were interrupted by thin broken cries. Looking cautiously around he saw on a pial of one of the houses flanking the tank a small shape, evidently a child. He drew near. It was kicking up its legs, a thumb inserted in the month, the other hand vaguely clutching at the air. The child looked sweet, though dirty. It was alone, left naked on the cold rough stones without a rag even to protect it from the chill. Small helpless things always appealed to him in a way, and the child now appealed to his cold heart.

Its cries thrilled him. It evoked strange nemories in him.

For a few moments Chidambaram stood gazing at the sombre sky. The sun had risen up in the far east, which yet looked so near. So near as to mock him. He was miserable—terribly miserable.

*

At 8 that morning he returned home.

Days passed. Sometimes he could affect to make a joke but internally he was deeply moved and his self-love immensely piqued. The child, a month later suddenly contracted pneumonia and one evening died. The parents felt a shock; but it was only temporary.

Chidambaram is now calm; his eyes are sad-looking, the outlines delicate. His senses are still acute and sometimes, he thinks he has made a miscalculation. About the phantom, none of them refer to.

There has been in him this wonderful quality—that, after all these mishaps—he is even full of confidence and doesn't lose hope. He is growing livelier and predicts great events. He waits for these with patience and lives with the thought of them whole months.

INJUSTICE

By SCHWARTZ PONRATNAM

WHENEVER I told my mother about the careless and indifferent attitude of my brother towards life and his future, she would reply that at my brother's age all human beings were in the same dreamy state, and that I myself was just the same at that time of my life.

I had already been told by my brother's teacher that he, Raju, was very playful and inattentive in class, and, moreover, that he had such a very confused views of things, as to mistake a subject like History for Chemistry.

'What abominable lies!' exclaimed my brother, when I attempted to break the news to him. 'He says that I play in class, because he is playing me false in my examination. He is down on me, and I'll tell you why—he can hear the salaams of my classmates because they are rudely roared at him, but my politely-voiced salaams he cannot hear, because he is deaf. And then, though I take my hand to my head to salaam to him, he only blinks at me, and chooses to think that, in reality, I am scratching my head.'

I know of no more apt description to give of my brother than to say that he had endeavoured to make himself a perfect 'youth of the day'—'one of the boys'—and that, in addition, he would snap out at me, his elder brother, and tell me to mind my own business, whenever I approached him with a word of advice.

In those days I was a clerk in a mercantile firm, drawing a salary of thirty rupees a month with which I supported my mother and my brother; and though, as to my own conduct, such a life was quiet and uneventful enough, I had never to fear monotony, with my brother, Raju, supplying one interesting episode after another.

'My patience is exhausted,' I said one day to my mother, when complaining of Raju's conduct. 'He will not alter his ways. What obstinacy!'

'Oh, he's still but a child,' said my mother, defending him.

'A child?' I returned, 'then a very lazy one! And how, with such laziness, can he ever rise to any station in life?'

'Oh, don't make hasty conclusions. I tell you he's but a child—a baby boy! True, he makes mistakes, but is it right to make a mountain of a molehill?'

'But are such things as he does, molehills? Why, he is an expert in fostering quarrels throughout the town. Is there much of a child about that? and is such conduct a mere molehill?'

'I tell you he is only a little fellow, with a child's brain—that is why he does such things. Don't be always on him, or he'll run away. He threatens to, and then who will bring him back home?'

'Then, are we to leave him to himself? For myself, I don't think he'll do much running away.'

'Oh, yes, he will! It would be just like him to. And what *should* I do, if he did? Yet I say, may God soon give him good sense! And, after all, he has his wits about him. Only yesterday he plucked some mango fruits from Chockalingam's garden, and when Chockalingam asked him why he had done so, he replied, "Why should I trouble you, great man, for a couple of mangoes? If I am hungry, who feels it but myself? And how do you know that I shall not want a mango or two when you are nowhere near, for me to ask you?"'

'Who told you that?'

'Raju himself.'

'Then it is a lie!'

'How can you say such a thing? Why, he does not know even the A.B.C. of lying—he, a mere baby boy!'

'Hm!—a baby! And he smokes cigarettes—many cigarettes!'

'Nowadays boys of his age do that.'

'And do you support that?'

'No, I do not. But nor do I exaggerate the seriousness of it. It is but a bad habit incidental to his age, and he'll leave it off as he grows older.'

My brother was sixteen, but to my mother he was still a little boy—a baby; she had, indeed, a sort of forgetfulness regarding his age. Only a few days before the above conversation took place I had heard her tell an old lady that my brother's age was only nine, and on my correcting that to sixteen, she returned, 'That is what I was saying—I said that his age was sixteen.' Here she had even forgotten what she had just said about Raju's age!

On my mother's saying that Raju would give up the cigarette habit later, I, saying nothing more, prepared to start for the office; but before I could leave, my brother, who, until then, had been still asleep, suddenly woke up, and came running into the dining-hall, to announce that he had succeeded in getting a job! 'Got a job!' I thought. 'Has he stopped his studies? And what sort of a job? Probably one to suit his own lethargic nature!' But I decided to say nothing until he had had an opportunity to explain matters. However, the whole thing seemed so ridiculous that I could not help laughing.

'See, he has found a job!' exclaimed my mother. 'And how you have been bandying words about him! I said he has brains!' And then, turning to Raju: 'On whose recommendation did you get it?'

'I got it by my own efforts,' declared Raju. 'I bribed nobody, nor did I suffer to get it. And it is an honest job, too—one I have invented myself from the modern craze, the science of injustice. In Tamil, it will be called, *Anniyaya Shastra*. Through this Shastra, we can read, like Astrology, the future money-difficulties in anybody's life. It deals with money alone. We shall earn anything up to five thousand or more a day.'

'What do you mean?' gasped my mother.

'Let me explain,' said Raju. 'Nowadays we see strange things happening—things of which, at one time, we had not even dreamt. Somebody presses a button, and the power of electricity lights a bulb. Many such things go on happening in the world. What looked foolish yesterday is to-day a real thing—something that is actually happening. But, see, the Madras University still goes on producing only clerks out of students—my brother, Muthia, is one of them.'

When he had finished, I, who had been listening, amused, laughed loudly—'*Anniyaya Shastra* Ha, ha, ha!'

'Why are you laughing?' demanded my mother. 'You make a joke of what others do, but you can't do anything yourself. At least, your brother has not tipped the gate-keeper of the office as you did when you first went to get an application form!'

I remained silent.

'Why don't you become a member of the A. A. S.—the Association of the Anniyaya Shastra?' demanded my brother.

'Mind your own business!' I retorted. 'If you want to enroll mother as a member, do so! She is the only other individual who has faith in your Shastra!'

'Are you mocking at me?' asked my mother, good-humouredly.

Pay-day was always a most happy day to me; the thrill of getting the reward for my month's labour, I found indescribable. That day my brother announced through his Shastra, that it was my pay day. I was cheerful throughout that day, and when office-hours were over, I played a set of tennis at the Cosmopolitan Club, of which I was a member, before I returned home.

When dusk fell, I made for home, taking a path which, running beside a purling stream led over a stretch of land that was covered with trees and bushes, and which looked at night as though it were part of a forest. This path was familiar to me, for, as the distance by it to our house was about half that by the public road, I frequently chose it for my way home.

Feeling unusually happy, I hummed a popular march-song as I strutted gleefully along; and when, every now and then, I put my hand on the money in my pocket, to assure myself that it was still there, it was like feeling the pulse of my happiness.

When I was about half-way across this stretch of land, I found myself in intense darkness, with no light to guide me, for now there were bushes on each side of me, and overhead the branches of big trees completely shut out the sky. How I regretted being so late! If only I had not tarried that extra half-hour at the Club! For I thought of the snakes; and knowing that now was the time when they came out of their dark, dismal underground chambers, to enjoy the free night air, my gay mood left me, and I felt afraid. Yes, I feared to see those queer creatures, with their hypnotic eyes wearing the expression of innocence, as they dragged their ropelike forms through the intricate undergrowth.

With conditions thus changed, I began to walk carefully, with all my senses awake. As I was thus proceeding, suddenly the flash of a torch-light caught my eyes—behind it I had just discerned the dark form of a man. So blinding was the effect of the light that I was obliged to bend my head and gaze downwards as I proceeded, for, not unduly disturbed by this incident, I continued on my way. But then, when I had gone but a few paces farther, again that light fell on me. So the person was travelling in the same direction as I was going, and keeping a little ahead of me! But why should he throw his light on my face! Before I could think of a reason, successive flashes of light struck my eyes, and irritated by them, I cried, 'Who's that?'

As I tried to pierce the darkness, yet once more the light dazzled my eyes, and, furious, I started to run towards it —but only to be tripped up! I fell, and was at once conscious of many hands playing on me—six, I believed. So there were three persons concerned in this attack—oh, they were robbers! And what were my feelings at the thought of my hardly-won pay being thus taken from me! Then, when their hands seemed to be in all my pockets at once, there was a cry of triumph; and then, the next moment, I was alone. They were gone—and so was my pay!

When I reached home, Raju was telling my mother that his first day's efforts with *Anniyaya Shastra* had yielded thirty rupees! Then, turning to me, he asked whether I had got my pay.

I shook my head.

But I had been thinking, and as a result of that, and of what I had heard him tell my mother, I believed he had experimented with his *Anniyaya Shastra* on me. Yes!—it was on me that he had proved it!

When I had explained the full meaning of *Anniyaya Shastra* to my mother, Raju received full payment in the shape of a severe scolding. And I, also, was not without payment—I was rebuked for being deceived!

MINION OF THE MOON

By S. RAJAGOPALAN

EVERYONE knows, of course, the author of "Indian Superstitions and their Place in Modern Thought". Picchu Sastri of Tanjore is not the man to be disheartened by the taunts of a scientific age. 'You are tickled by my belief in Sraddha, but what do Sir Frederick Myers and Barrett say?' Now sir, how are you going to meet our Sastri? Our Sastri is a scientist and bore. He tells you that Sraddha is a spiritualistic act, Sandhyavandana is telepathy with the Sun, (as for that, there were attempts to wireless to Mars) and so on.

It was very worrying—the life Sastri lived for the past ten years. To a superstitious man everything is bristling with significance. If a harmless cat crosses his path, he thinks he is damned. If a stray lizard makes an amorous click (I mean, it is calling its mate) Sastri looks for its ominous indication in the almanac. Our Sastri's house is infested with these Reptile Astrologers. One Sunday Mr Lizard clicked. Sastri cried for the almanac, and when it was brought to him by Kittu, he hastily referred to it. He found the word, Fear. Sastri could not make head or tail of the lizard—I mean, of what the lizard meant. Who was going to fear—himself or the lizard, and fear whom? On Thursday Mr Lizard (per gratis, let it be a lesson to our professional astrologers) predicted ill-luck. A fine idea struck Sastri. He moved to the north part of his room on all Mondays, to the south part of the same on all Tuesdays and climbed to the very roof of his house on all Saturdays, for it was ominous if the lizard clicked from the direction of the sky on Saturdays. But what about the lizard—wouldn't it shift its position? That's what you may ask. Sastri put it in a cage! And the lizard predicted Prosperity, Male Child, Dowry, Hundred Years of Life, Interview with the Emperor, Present of silver-lined clothes and what not. Sastri was sick with delight.

Sastri never stirs out of his house in the Rahu Kalam. He will sit glum in his room and nobody comes near him at that time. If one dares to talk to him during the Rahu Kalam a quarrel is certain to break out. Poor, distorted Rahu won't care to bring about the quarrel; Sastri will create it out of respect for the God of Eclipse.

Above all, Sastri was interested in the third phasis of the moon. The sight of it, he thought, was the *summum bonum* of his monthly life. There is prevalent in these parts the very queer belief that one who gets sight of the third phasis of the moon shall be prosperous for the whole month; if indeed, such a fairly long period of joy and plenty is guaranteed, lawyers and beggars may try the trick. But one who sees the moon in her fourth phasis shall be assailed by poverty for the whole month and be born a dog in one's next birth! Unluckily, or rather luckily, the fate of a man who happens to see both the phases is left unmentioned.

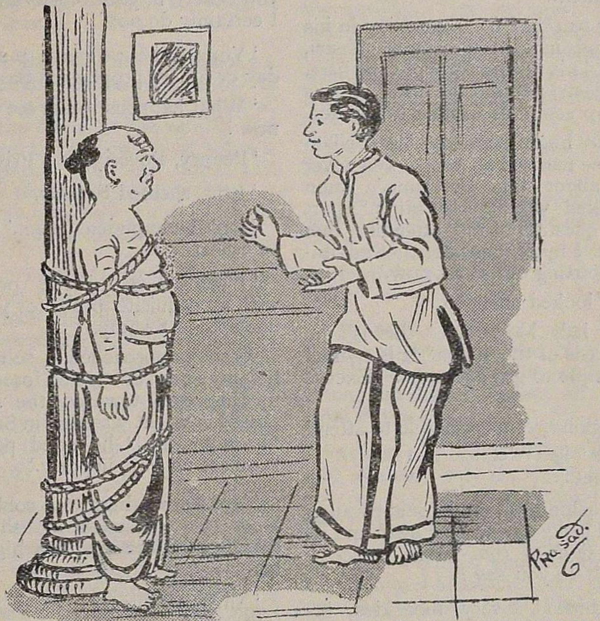
On every newmoon day our Sastri leaves strict injunctions with his wife and son to remind him of the third day from it lest he should forget. Once it happened that Seshi and Kittu went to the temple in the evening of the third lunar day. Our Sastri saw the fourth day moon and was under the impression that he had seen the auspicious crescent. He came to realise his mistake the very next day and burst into irrepressible fury and almost barked as though in anticipation of his next birth. It is needless to describe what happened that month. Poverty and distress as-

sailed Sastri—poverty because he had to spend a good deal for the recovery of his wife from the illness she had cunningly fallen into (thus, you see, she was safe from hits and rebukes) ; distress because Sastri could not bear the idea of feeling the rod of the Corporation on his skin in his next birth.

Sastri was resolved never to miss the glorious moon in her third phasis from that time onward. He hit upon a rather queer, but anyway serviceable, idea. Since his people betrayed him he could not rely on their memory, nor on his. Therefore, after every newmoon day, he would tie two blocks of wood in his dhoti. One block would be removed at the close of one day so that he would be sure to remember to see the auspicious crescent on the third day. And the more exquisite arrangement of his was that he had himself securely tied to a pillar on the day the moon in the fourth phasis appeared so that he could never see it.

On a day when appeared the moon in her fourth phasis, and our Sastri was tied to the pillar, there was the sound of footsteps in what might be called the drawing room. Sastri hastily tried to free himself from the naughty knots, but in vain. Dawned Swamy on the threshold.

'Impish brat, this Kittu,' said Sastri. 'Come in Swamy. Work of my little son. Take that seat. All kicking at home, I hope ?'



'Impish brat, this Kittu,' said Sastri. 'Come in, Swamy.'

'Where is Seshi ?' asked Swamy and proceeded to untie the rope.

'Oh, gone to her sister and with her Kittu.'

'But how could he have tied you ?'

'Er—now, look here, don't untie me. It is the doctor's prescription for gout.'

'Really ?' said Swamy sceptically. He dimmed the light that was there.

'Why do you do it? You are so much changed, Swamy, eh what?'

'I want dim light. Now, you are free.'

'I am undone! It is the fourth day moon!' cried Sastri. Swamy was not stunned by the words. He heard Sastri's words with as much equanimity as a Congress man hears a sentence of imprisonment.

Swamy searched for something in his pocket and handed it over to Sastri, saying: 'This is what brought me here, uncle.' Sastri perused the letter. There was an expression of wonder in his face.

'What!' he exclaimed, 'is Sellam going to be married so soon. You never told me about this last time.' Anon Sastri looked vexed. He said: 'Apart from the question of my attending her marriage, I must consider the advisability of starting out at all, now.'

Swamy looked offended.

'Now, lad, look here—this is the fourth phasis of the moon. It is against my principle to go out now. Excuse me.'

'Is it against your principle to attend your niece's marriage?'

'Well put!'

'I have a fine idea, uncle,' said Swamy, 'you may bend down your head and so avoid the sight of the cursed crescent. Now, what do you say?'

'A good idea! A very nice idea, indeed!' said Sastri. He patted Swamy on the back, put on his best dress, and took with him all available cash.

Sellam's marriage came on the next day. The Trivandrum Express was the only available train at that time of the night. And there was a distance of five miles to be covered from the village where Sastri lived to the railway station. Uncle and nephew went on silently along the country track.

'I never believe in your superstitions,' said Swamy.

'You, townsmen, believe in nothing,' remarked Sastri.

'Do you think this moon has any influence on your prosperity and adversity?'

'Why, certainly, I do,' said Sastri, 'but let me know if you are in disguise, Swamy. I couldn't see you well in the dim light. Now, I find you a little altered.'

'Don't be irrelevant. Answer me, do you believe in your omens and such rot. I certainly do not.'

'You will be properly punished one day or other,' prophesied Sastri.

'What happens if you see the moon now?'

'Penury, Poverty, and Privations.'

'Eh!' sneered Swamy.

Don't be impudent, man,' reprimanded Sastri.

'I think I had better provide you with an exquisite proof for your belief, uncle,' said Swamy.

As they approached a solitary grove Swamy seized Sastri and forcedly turned up his eyes towards the sky. The cursed crescent was cast in Sastri's eyes! 'I am undone!' he cried pathetically, 'you are an imp, nephew.'

'No, I am a highway robber, uncle. Now to business. Cash! Sastri!' thundered Swami-nephew-highway-robber.

'Ah, superstitions are true!' muttered Sastri.

'Cash!' thundered the robber, 'cash for watching you for the past three months.' Sastri meekly obeyed his 'nephew'!

'Don't think I have robbed you, my dear sir. On the other hand, you have robbed me. . . .do you know of what. . . . of a valuable fact, ay, a priceless instance which for ages proves beyond all dream of doubt that superstitions are no grandma's yarns, but the quintessence of truth. And now, sir, good night.'

THE BOWL OF NIGHT

By M. R. M. SUNDARAM

THROUGH the window I could see the crescent moon floating like a silver smile in the vast blue peopled with star angels.

There was silence all around. Only the weary breeze was stirring in the trees, gently whispering a secret message to the drowsy leaves.

On such a night as this, one having a turn for rhymes cannot but take up his pen. I was sitting near the window, looking at the flame of the candle and biting the end of my pen. Half a dozen sheets of paper had been torn and thrown into the wastepaper basket. A fresh one was patiently waiting on the pad, probably to share the same fate.

I turned my head towards the moon. It no longer resembled a silver smile, but looked like a bleeding scar. And as I went on watching it, it grew dimmer and dimmer and at last died away like the vision of a dream. The stars now looked like so many crystal drops of tears and the whisper of the breeze changed to the music of a deep and lonely sorrow.

My fingers were burning with impatience to write something. But my heart, too full of vague emotions, could not pour them out through words. To drown my uneasiness and my meaningless emotions in some sparkling pond of thoughts and images! I pulled out Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat from the shelf and pored over the pages, until at last, sleep overcame me and forced me to rest my head on the table.

Someone was opening the door of my study. Some mysterious footsteps were advancing towards me. The next moment, on the other side of the table, a chair creaked. It was certain some one had taken a seat in front of me.

I raised my head. The calm and composed figure of an old man was dimly visible to me. The candle had gone out.

'I beg your pardon,' said a deep voice, 'for my untimely intrusion. May I introduce myself as Omar Khayyam.'

I jumped up, struck a match and lit the candle. The stranger's face was broad, intelligent, and wrinkled. A pair of penetrating eyes searched me through and through, and the silver beard brushing over his breast demanded of me awe and veneration.

I was first puzzled, then frightened, and finally amused.

'Hallo, how long have you been at large? From which lunatic asylum . . ?'

'Young man, you'll greatly regret your words,' said he in a clear, majestic voice.

'My dear Omar Khayyam—if he you really are—how have you, may I venture to ask, managed to lift up the tombstone and travel hither all the way from Persia?'

'What had become dust unto dust long ago was only the frail frame that covered me. I, that Eternal Me, am now a free soul, blessed with immortality. I wander at my will in the universal space . . . Perhaps you are puzzled over the flesh-and-blood-creature talking to you. Are you not? Well, I have assumed a human shape, simply that you may not be frightened.'

'Please pardon me if I am still doubtful,' said I. 'They say you were —and now, you being here, you are—a great astronomer. In that case you should be able to answer some questions in astronomy.'

'You are very impudent, my dear sir. Yes, I am not unconcious of your situation. I would have behaved in the same manner, were I you . . . Pray, come out with your questions.'

I became proud. I sat erect, putting on a platform air. Had I not the honour of questioning like a schoolmaster, one of the immortals, one of the greatest of ancient poets ?

'Do the stars move ? You will admit this is a very intelligent question.'

'Of course yes, though we say they are fixed. Their motion is not perceived by us, that's all.'

'Are the planets as many electric bulbs, shining of their own accord ?'

'A fine way of asking scientific questions! The planets are never shining bodies without the sun.'

'Bravo! How do you explain the galaxy ? Is it the ocean of milk referred to in the Hindu Scriptures ?'

'Even so it may be said to be, if each star in the galaxy represented an atom of milk.'

'Hear, hear!' cried I. But I could not be sure of the personage, before a final proof. Hence, I asked in a deliberate voice, 'Is there any mystical similarity between a canvass tent and the blue tent of heaven ?'

The expression of my friend's face showed extreme pain. I had wounded him to the quick by my reference to his other profession, that of a tent-maker.

He was Omar Khayyam. I had no more misgivings. I apologised for my rudeness and began to be hospitable.

'Mr Omar, I'm sorry I don't have a flask of wine to give you. A loaf of bread, you can have. Also a book of verse! A heap of them, if you wish. And wilderness! Well, I have a picture-album. I'm sure you will find many wild things in it!'

Perhaps he did not like my jokes, for he was silent.

I took out from the drawer a new candle, saying aloud, 'Another and another candle!'

'My dear friend,' he began, 'you should know that Rubaiyat is only the expression of a mood ; and to accuse me with drunkenness is a Himalayan blunder . . . Oh, the pity of it all! Almost everybody knows me ; yet everybody almost knows me not!'

'What you said now is quite true,' said I wisely. 'Just look at those countless editions of your poem. They range from a penny to a pound. Just look at those countless artists who have built a rainbow bridge over the stream of your verse. And look at those swollen eyes who recite your rhymes to excuse themselves.'

A long silence followed this. Feeling awkward I wanted to break it.

'Now that you are here, may I ask of you a message to the present day world ? The modern world has a great hunger for messages from highbrows. A poet is invited to express his opinion on the future radio, and a scientist is asked to describe the various apartments of heaven and hell. You are a poet. The choice is open to you from wine to elixir, from a screw to an aeroplane, from a grain of sand to the world, from the world to the universe!'

He blinked at me for a while and singing the couplet:

'The Bird of Time has but a little way.'
To fly—and lo! the Bird is on the wing.'

he vanished into the yawning bowl of night.

And from somewhere a birdlike voice was singing :

'Awake! for morning in the Bowl of Night
Has flung the stone that puts the stars to flight
And lo! the hunter of the east has caught
The Sultan's turret in a noose of light.'

"SHE"

By A. RAMIAH

WE all know what badges are. Almost all professions have them. In most cases you can fix almost everyone about his calling. The doctor with his stethescope glancing out of his pocket or garlanding his neck, the soldier with his burnished epaulette, the monk with his cowl, and the deacon with his stole are proclamations and placards themselves.

Thus with men only. But when we consider men and women together and give ourselves the pleasure of comparative study we find that women have more badges, visible, suggestive, and pronounced than men.

To begin at the very beginning man is always Mr but a woman is Miss or Mrs or Dame as the case may be. She is always out to proclaim to the world that she is either married, single, or widowed. Man can't do that. Has he any badge to proclaim that he is a widower ? And then women are always young. They smirk and blush and smile if you call them kitten, but call them cat and you better look out for squalls. But man is always man. The way she dresses her hair, the sort of ring she wears, the length of her skirt (perhaps not now), and other badges are self-evident. And when it comes to 'attaining her age' what a fuss is made of it, especially in our land ! The event is advertised with much pomp and waste.

Take any kind of literature. God ! Is there any of its kind without She being given a mighty big place ? How much of the book is taken up with a riot of her physical and psychic attributes ! It is always She that is up and doing and dominating. She is here, there, everywhere. She weeps and you get into hysterics over it. The poets find divinity only in women. Her locks are raven, her eyes are stars, her cheeks are rosebloums, her lips are cherries, her tears are pearldrops. But when man weeps he is effeminate, silly, poltroonish and what not.

Talking of divinity take wealth and learning. Who does not wish for them ? who presides over them ? Women to be sure. Lakshmi and Sarasvati. All that is nice and good and desirable in life is presided over by goddesses and not gods. Who is the most dreaded deity ? Kali. Well, it is a She again. In the Gita Lord Krishna says that he has in him the seven feminine forms, *viz.*, fame, propriety, speech, memory, intelligence, firmness, forgiveness—seven great impulses feminine in gender !

I remember once a very bellicose educated lady (married then but since divorced from her husband) speaking at a gathering that no man should marry a woman unless he has enough of the wherewithal to maintain her. Absolutely. The fact is that the poor fellow pays for all the whims and caprices of the woman, and

> 'commits his body
> to painful labour both by sea and land,
> to watch the night in storms, the day in cold
> whilst thou liest warm at home, secure and safe ;
> and craves no other tribute at thy hands
> but love, fair looks and true obedience,
> too little payment for so great a debt.
> Such duty as the subject owes the prince,
> even such a woman oweth to her husband ;
> and when she is froward, peevish, sullen, sour,
> and not obedient to his honest will,
> what is she but a foul contending rebel,
> and graceless traitor to her loving lord ?'

Does she contribute a pie towards all the good things she enjoys—for her separate schools and colleges, separate hospitals, jails, and lunatic asylums ?

He pays. But she will, in spite of all, push her way through into man's preserves and will take all the pennies leaving the kicks for him.

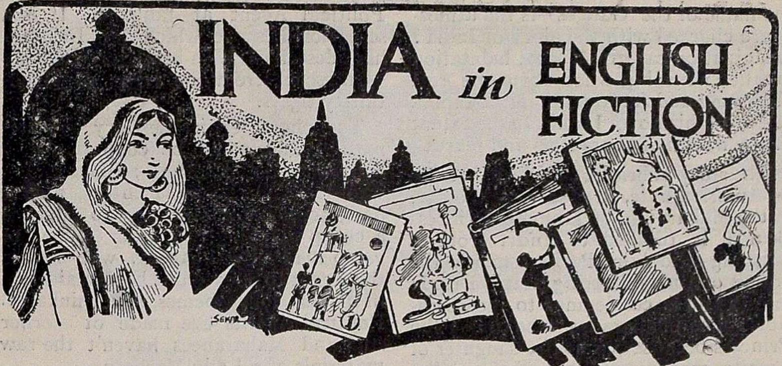
The thing is woman is nothing if not a bargainer. She wants to eat the bread and have it too. It is so pronounced in the economic sphere in this monstrous economic age. If man up till now has been playing the piper it is time that he is given some respite consequent upon the large number of women taking to paying professions.

'Ugly ducklings dream of princes charming.'

Among the poor and uneducated workingclass there is no such thing as the women's problem or the widow's problem as we have in the educated middle class. The policy of give and take among them, the pooling of the earnings of both men and women in the interests of their children, are factors very conducive to the smooth working of the family. In sharp contrast to this look at the plight of a family with educated daughters, college girls. The insensate desire to have a B. A. Degree after her name carries our blue stocking year by year away from the matrimonial world. Desirable young men have already been spirited away by designing fathers-in-law. Ugly ducklings dream of princes charming. . . . the ego is too-too pronounced in the I. C. S., I. M. S., I. P. S., I F. S., I. E. S.

As you and I know there is rampant the cry against bridegroom's price in our country. It comes to this that man should marry for love and not for money. I can understand it if woman too shares the sentiment. Has she not an eye, a big eye upon the economic worth of her partner in life? If he has the label of a permanent government job she is ready to sacrifice all conventions and all convictions. It matters not whether the I. C. S. or the I. M. S. is the son of a cook or a priest, one-eyed or pockmarked, lame or lanky. Pedigree belongs more to the animal world than to the world of man. He is of the imperial service. He lives in an imperial noon.

INDIA in ENGLISH FICTION



'I wanted to know how far Indian thought had pierced, whether any Buddhist had gone beyond Gautama, whether any new and fruitful generalization had come from Hindu thinkers, whether any Yogi or holy man had ever planted his lantern out into the uncharted darkness? Nothing of any moment could I get from Kipling, no illuminating word. I came to the conclusion that he took but little interest in new ideas.' FRANK HARRIS.

'THE Indian Empire is composed of British India and also of the Indian States. The chiefs of these States, the native princes, Nizams, Maharajahs, Nawabs and Rajahs, we associate in our minds with priceless emeralds and jewel carpets, mortal intrigues, weird courts with hundreds of concubines, bejewelled dancing girls, rows of gaudily adorned elephants, mediæval pomp and pageantry, mystery and romance. But our acquaintance with their relation to the rest of India is really slight. That they are very important people can be gathered from the fact that of the total area of the Indian Empire—1,805,332 square miles—thirty nine per cent is occupied by their territories. Their kingdoms hold twenty-three per cent of the empire's population, or about seventy-two millions. Scattered over the map of the peninsula are five hundred and sixty two such Indian States, each governed by its own prince; or if the prince is a minor, by his regent. Their territories vary in size from properties of just a few holdings to a country as large as Italy.' This is a long quotation (made long on purpose) from Savel Zimand's "Living India" and is intended to be a contrast of the Indian States in fact and in fiction.

Wings of Desire, *The Madonna of the Sleeping Cars*, *The Thirteenth Lover*, *Serenade to the Hangman*, *Passion Lighting the World*, *The Sphinx Has Spoken*, *Perfumed Tigers*—these are some of the names of the novels of Maurice Dekobra, names that have the music and the meaning of poetry; but his creative faculty seems to be on the decline in *Princess Brinda*,* his recently published novel. Mr Dekobra has also written travel-books which through his wit and cleverness he has saved from being mere tourist-guides; in writing *Princess Brinda* he appears to have sat in a dimly-lit room before a map of India and done much thought-reading. Imagine one standing on the banks of the Seine and addressing the river by

*Translated from "Le Prison des Rêves by Metcalfe Wood. Werner Laurie, Ltd., 7s. 6d.

the name of the Ganges—is the atmosphere charged with the glory of India? Imagination can give a local habitation an alien name but what about the real alien tang and fragrance? Mr Dekobra has made his novel Indian to the extent of the names of characters and places.

The story in brief is this. Daughter by an Austrian wife, Magda von Werder, of the Maharajah of Jahlpore Princess Brinda is recalled to India from a finishing school in Paris to marry the prince of a neighbouring State. Brinda refuses and is condemned to incarceration. The Maharanee who hates the Princess because she is the daughter of a white woman who has alienated her from her husband, persecutes Brinda with all the intensity her hatred is capable of. Brinda however escapes and finds happiness with Captain Armstrong, Political Agent at Jahlpore. It is a sensational escape which Mr Dekobra has described with breatless vividness—an escape from the fangs of bloodthirsty tigers.

The characters in the story are unnatural and could be connected only with a world of phantasy; a Maharajah who looks on complacently at his daughter being pilloried, who imports a cheap dancing girl from Cuba to vamp the Political Agent, who makes the Agent to stay with him to aid him in his nefarious schemes, is unthinkable. Political Agents are made of sterner stuff and Maharanees haven't the raw materials of a Lady Macbeth.

Princess Brinda is more amazing than amusing; it hasn't a dull patch; it is throughout delightfully Dekobraesque.

AN INDO-ANGLIAN

THE sun and stars that float in the open air;

The apple-shaped earth, and we upon it—surely the drift of them is something grand!

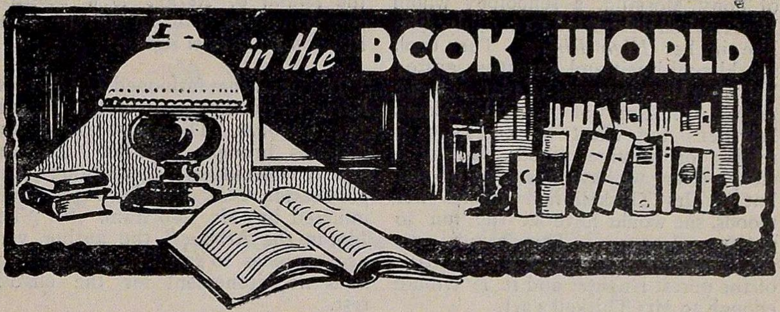
I do not know what it is except that it is grand, and that it is happiness,

And that the enclosing purport of us here is not a speculation, or bon—mot, or reconnaissance,

And that it is not something which by luck may turn out well for us, and without luck must be a failure for us,

And not something which may yet be retracted in a certain contingency.—

WALT WHITMAN



INDO-ENGLISH

A Survey of Anglo-Indian Fiction, by Bhupal Singh, M.A. (Humphrey Milford, 12s. 6d.)

COVERING about a period of a century and a half, Mr Bhupal Singh, who is senior Professor of English at Dyal Singh College, Lahore, deals with nearly a thousand novels in his Survey, clearly and coherently. Prof Singh is very generous in his judgments; he is witty and provokes refreshing laughter when talking of the influence of Kipling and his school. An Indian criticising the Englishman's understanding of India, Prof Singh's venture is new and unique. The Survey has an extensive bibliography.

M.S.K.

ENGLISH

The Jasmine Farm, by the author of " Elizabeth and Her German Garden " (Heinemann, 7s. 6d.)

The Demon in the House, by Angela Thirkell (Hamish Hamilton, 7s. 6d.)

Island of Refuge, by John Fisher (Dent, 7s. 6d.)

The Banquet, by R. H. Mottram (Chatto and Windus, 7s. 6d.)

Short Stories, by Guy de Maupassant (Dent [Everyman's Library], 2s.)

LADY MIDHURST, after the death of her dissolute husband, finds solace in her widowhood through setting the highest possible value on morals. Andrew Leigh, her secretary is a married man and one she infinitely trusts; but when the fact leaks out that her 'nobly beautiful' young daughter Lady Terence who lives with her is the mistress for many years of Andrew Leigh there is a scandal, and much shocked Lady Midhurst flies to the Jasmine Farm, a cottage of hers in the South of France. Mrs de Lacy, Andrew's mother-in-law, who has smelt the spice follows her; the two ladies manage between themselves to live a life which is luminous with laughter and compact of a quiet dignity. 'Instead of destroying the Midhursts, and nothing whatever gained by it, she (Mrs de Lacy), would become their indispensable friend. Instead of crashing a scandal about their ears, she would work with them, indispensable again, at hushing it up. Magnanimously indeed, seeing how deeply wronged her Rosie was, she would promise to say nothing about it, and in return for not carrying the case into the divorce courts be taken to the family's bosom—that care-free bosom, replete, in the language of house-agents, with every comfort.' Andrew who had married Roise in the War and straightaway repented is sure of his passion; he adores Lady Terence and his sincerity is a great difficulty in the way of divorce. Death achieves the triumph, death most tragic. *The Jasmine Farm* is a mixture of tragedy and farce, wisdom and fun; the tragic element, however, remains the edged thing.

The Demon in the House tells of the exploits during the holidays of the year

of Tony Morland, a schoolboy whom Mrs Thirkell delineated so terribly life-like in her *High Rising*. The book sparkles with wit and narrative gusto; but from the viewpoint of plot it lacks flesh. A mixing of natural colours heightens the effect of a picture; a mixing of genuine moods, that of a story. Here we have a surfeit of fun but if Mrs Thirkell had mixed her moods, she would have set the fun to greater advantage. This critical examination apart, the book gives a bath of the purest laughter and it is tribute enough to Mrs Thirkell's art.

'In the *Island of Refuge* Mr Fisher has knit together the destinies and in many cases the happy escape of these refugees from reality, and out of the heterogeneous elements has built up a book so proportionate and ordered that the reader has the feeling of being present at the performance of a musical symphony. . . . Scholars, connoisseurs, dilettanti, sybarites, *ingenues*, and the most blatant tourists all come to play a part in this symphony of cosmopolitanism; but whatever their main label, these people are living individuals with a claim upon our interest and sympathy, and at the end we leave them, as we leave the island of Sicily, with an almost unbearable sense of the nostalgia for a beauty which we cannot define but which we know we have savoured to the full.' For once the publisher's note speaks the truth; the *Island of Refuge* is a beautiful complement to, not an advane on Mr Fisher's *To Dream Again.*

The hand that fashioned *The Spanish Farm* is quite out, is not in form in *The Banquet.* The short stories and sketches brought together here are utterly devoid of distinction; this publication is a literary injury self-inflicted by Mr Mottram. In "The Idol in the Arbour" the author very nearly comes to gain his equipoise but it is no atonement for the chaotic rest.

Maupassant is generally acknowledged to be the master of the short story and the delightful *conte;* he had a genius for creating drama by the exploitation of an incident or a facet of character. In the Everyman volume are over thirty of his best-known stories and the publishers say they are fortunate to have secured the translation of Marjorie Laurie, since it is thought by many—including the *Times Literary Supplement*—that it is the best English version in existence.' And it is fitting that such a genius as Maupassant should be introduced by a leading contemporary fiction critic like Mr Gerald Gould who has summed him up in these tidy and happy words: 'He knew well the tenderness of pure and passionate love.'

PEREGRINE PICKLE

A GIFT appreciated all the year round!

A GIFT enjoyed by the whole family!!

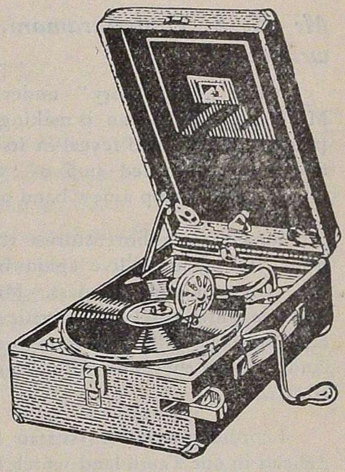
A GIFT that gives lasting pleasure!!!

that's

"HIS MASTER'S VOICE" GRAMOPHONE

and some selected Records

There's something about a Portable—an informal, friendly spirit—a good traveller—and always a good companion. It is liked by all for its sturdy build, beautiful appearance and above all sweet tone. Fitted with No 5A Sound Box and extra long horn it gives sufficient volume to entertain a family group. Why not decide on getting one to-day.



Model 102.

"His Master's Voice"

Reduced Prices

Black	Rs. 100
De Luxe & Walnut	,, 110

Lists sent on application.

The Gramophone Co., Ltd.

No. 90. 45, South Parade BANGALORE

Mr K. S. Venkataramani, famous novelist and essayist writes :—

"The Short Story" under the brilliant editorship of my friend Mr Manjeri S. Isvaran is making an epoch whose significance only the passage of time will reveal in its true perspective. It is easy to secure and print the jaded stuff of 'well-known' writers but so difficult to discover and group a new band of young writers.

Mr Isvaran's short stories themselves are some of the richest slices from life made to live again by words of poetic feeling that widen our range of consciousness. Mr Chalapathi who has already made a name as a first rate literary critic is an acquisition as a short story teller His approach to life has something of the impulse of the sea towards the land—a deep rhythmic roll of thought breaking into words of embroidered foam.

I cordially wish Mr Isvaran success in a difficult line, all the more difficult in our Tamil land which has for ages enriched its leisure only by chewing *pan.*